'Religious' and 'Pure' literatures are but varieties of literature. If we consider what we might call literature proper or 'real' literature as being the centre of an imaginary circle of experience which subsumes both form and content, then these two varieties fall on either sides of the outer periphery. In religious literature, primacy is given to the content. It is the experience communicating some religious illumination or information which is more important than the form used. On the other hand, in pure literature, it would appear that from the point of view of form, the type of art used is the art of the musician. For, as Vivian says on the subject of 'the priority of art' in Oscar Wilde's "The Decay of Lying", 'Art never expresses anything but itself... reveals her own perfection'.¹ Walter Pater, another aesthete, also talks of music being the artistic ideal of complete and perfect identification of matter (content) and form. Smidt (1961: 48), discussing the relation of the formal elements to the private material used by the poet, concludes that
the purpose of complexity of form 'must be, first, the precise expression of finer shades of feeling and thought.'

Finding that the pronouncement here is merely 'asserting the primacy of form', Smidt assures us that a more thorough examination of Eliot's thought on the subject would reveal an underlying consistency. We shall come to this question later in the chapter.

T S Eliot muses in his introduction to A Choice of Kipling's Verse (1941: 18):

Most of us are interested in the form for its own sake — not apart from the content, but because we aim at making something which shall first of all be, something which in consequence will have the capability of exciting, within a limited range, a considerable variety of responses from different readers. (Eliot's emphasis).

What is to be marked in the statement is the phrase 'not apart from the content'. So, a majority, he seems to suggest, is interested in the form together with the content. Our intention in retaining such interest is in making art be; have existence before anything else.
But this was not what Kipling had in mind. His was a position which seemed to run to the contrary. Let us have a look at the other part of the statement:

For Kipling the poem is something which is intended to act — and for the most part his poems are intended to elicit the same response from all readers.... (Eliot's emphasis).

That is not all. There is more to come. The comparison is now between Kipling and some of the other poets and this is how Eliot puts it:

For other poets, at least, for some other poets — the poem may begin to shape itself in fragments of musical rhythm, and its structure will first appear in terms of something analogous to musical form; and such poets find it expedient to occupy their conscious mind with the craftsman's problems, leaving the deeper meaning to emerge, if there, from a lower level.

Let us look at how it compares when we posit the two streams of thought. The poem, for Kipling, is intended to act. Also, to elicit the same response from all readers. Here we have
two verbs, to act and to elicit. To 'act' is 'to exert force or influence' and at the same time, 'to produce an effect'.\(^6\) To 'elicit' is 'to draw forth' and 'to evoke'.\(^7\) Earlier on, Eliot had written that our interest in form was primarily because our aim is that something (the poem) shall be in the first place. To 'be' is 'to exist; to live; to have the state or quality mentioned'.\(^8\) Thus, the poem must exist and have a form before it starts exerting force or influence with a view to producing an effect or evoking a response to the 'point of view' in it as Eliot would call it. That may be what Eliot sees as happening in Kipling's case but what about the other poets? The poem has its existence for other poets in something that has a form analogous to music. It shapes itself in 'fragments of musical rhythm'. These are the poets who cannot in any way forget that the process of arriving at meaning in never personal and never conscious.

What does that mean in ordinary terms? Simply this: Kipling's poems are largely intended at evoking 'the same response from all readers' whereas in the case of the other poets, their concern is with occupying 'their conscious mind with the craftsman's problems, leaving the deeper meaning to emerge... from a lower level.' And in both these cases, we have poets doing what is not really their business. Their business is to put their points of view across and leave it to the good sense of the readers to come to their own conclusions.
on the basis of these points of view. In other words, it is not for the poet to decide what is good for his or her readers and what is not. Now, on to the main point in this chapter.

II

We come to religious literature first. T S Eliot distinguishes what he considers to be the three senses in which we use the term 'religious literature.' In the first place, we have 'religious literature' much in the same way as we have 'historical literature' or 'scientific literature'. A second sense in which the term is used sometimes, even oftener, is to refer to 'religious' or 'devotional' poetry, calling such a variety a minor one. Eliot gets down to the task of explaining why this is so. To quote Eliot,

the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter... leaving out what men consider their major passions....

In case of poets like Vaughan, Southwell, Crashaw, Herbert, or Hopkins, he says that their poetry is the product of a special religious awareness, which may exist without the general awareness which we expect of the major poet.
This brings us to the third sense in which the term 'religious literature' is used and, that is, a literary writing of some writer who is 'sincerely desirous of forwarding the cause of religion' giving it the shape of a propagandist writing.

Clearly, Eliot rejects all these three usages of the term because they do not, in any way, help shed any light on the relation between religion and literature as Eliot finds it to be: 'a conscious and limited relating'.

We shall take up each of these senses and try to find out what is wrong with them.

Firstly, 'religious literature' is a term whose coinage is analogous with that of 'historical literature' or 'scientific literature'. Explains Eliot that we can treat the authorized translation of The Bible as literature as we can the historical writings of Clarendon or Gibbon. He notes that

All of these writers were men who, incidentally to their religious, or historical, or philosophic purpose, had a gift of language which makes them delightful to read....even if they (the readers) are unconcerned with the objects which the writers had in view. (Parenthesis supplied).
It is to be noted that the works are 'delightful to read' mainly due to their authors' 'gift of language'. Their purpose — religious, historical or philosophic — seems to have become secondary to it. At a time when the subject of discussion and the medium are at a variance or when the latter is given primacy over content, then we are faced with a typical situation. Eliot cautions us that though a scientific, or historical, or theological, or philosophic work which is also 'literature', may become superannuated as anything but literature, yet it is not likely to be 'literature' unless it had its scientific or other value for its own time.  

As in case of a majority of Eliot's statements, this one is also in two parts. We are told that a scientific, or historical, or theological work is also literature at the same time. Such a work is likely to get superannuated as a scientific, or historical work or the like and get reduced to being merely a literary piece. This is unlikely to happen if it were not to have any scientific or other value for the time in which it has been written. One might like to see that any given literature is in tune with its time when it has a wider awareness of issues involved. It would become superannuated when the work in hand loses its relevance insofar as the present times are concerned. In
order to be relevant or to remain in active use, the work must project the needs of the time.

A good example of 'religious literature' in this sense of the term is *Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Here is Chapter IV of Book Twelve of *Confessions*:

What can we call that formlessness, how convey it to men's sluggish minds, save by finding some word already familiar? In the whole of the world what can be found closer to total formlessness than "earth" and "deep"? They are least in beauty because of the lowly grade they hold, below all higher things that shine so brilliantly. Why then should I not take it that this formless matter, which You created without beauty and yet made of it a world so beautiful, is meant to be conveyed to me with sufficient name of earth, invisible and without form.  

(St Augustine's emphasis)

Obviously, Saint Augustine is talking about the situation at the time of Genesis. This earth was, according to him, 'a profound abyss' having 'no light' and was 'altogether formless'. He fondly asks:
Was it not You, Lord, who taught me that before You gave form and outline to that formless matter, there was not anything, neither color nor shape nor spirit? Yet was there not utterly nothing; there was a certain formlessness without anything to specify it.  

Saint Augustine celebrates the creation of earth. There was 'not utterly nothing', for 'there was a certain formlessness' before the creation of the world. There was no colour; there was no shape; nor was there any spirit. If that was the case, then we wonder how the Saint could refer to the 'profound anyss' as 'matter'. That it was formless is not in question but how could an abyss be called matter? Saint Augustine finds 'earth' and 'deep' to be words closer as synonyms to 'total formlessness'.

We are not concerned here with the analysis of Saint Augustine's writings. Our concern is more with the subject matter of the Confessions. The question of value that Eliot talks about is relevant in this case. Confessions may be said to have its value: universal and artistic, not only for its time but for all times. It is relevant even today. It has not become superannuated at all: neither as
literature nor even as a religious work. It holds good today for the simple reason that like The Bible, it contains the truth about God and man.

The second sense in which the term 'religious literature' is used is that of a 'devotional' writing. The concern of the artist in this 'devotional' work is not its treatment of 'the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit' but something that has to deal with or that deals with 'a confined part of this subject matter.' In the process, what happens is that the 'major passions' of man are left out of it, for it 'is the product of a special awareness' which may exist outside the bounds of a 'general awareness'. George Herbert's work is among the work of those poets who may be considered 'devotional' poets. And so is that of Vaughan. Since we have already discussed the Jordan poems of Herbert, in the earlier chapter, let us take a look at Vaughan's "The World":

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
   All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
   Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd, In which the world
   And all her train were hurl'd;
The doting Lover in his queintest strain
Did their Complain,
Neer him, his Lute, his fancy, and his flights,
Wits sour delights,
With gloves, and knots the silly shares of pleasure
Yet his dear Treasure
All scatter'd lay, while he his eys did pour
Upon a flowr. 16

We have here 'Eternity' compared to 'a great Ring of pure and endless light' which was calm and bright. Underneath this eternity was 'Time' also round and 'Driv'n by spheres' compared to 'a vast shadow mov'd'. The world was 'hurl'd' into this vast shadow: the abyss, the primal darkness of an eternal 'night'. Alongside these two abstractions, Vaughan places 'the doting Lover' (attention is drawn to the word 'Lover' with an 'L' in capitals). And this 'Lover' complained of being ditched? No, 'his eys did pour/Upon a flowr' while everything else that he used for creation, 'the silly snares of pleasure', lay scattered around him. How do we reconcile the abstraction with the concrete? The difficulty faced in answering this question might be minimised if we could reconsider the 'Lover'. Who is this 'doting Lover' and what has he to do with 'Eternity' and 'Time'? The way in which the strings are juxtaposed, we are bound to think that this
'doting Lover' is God who created us all. And scattered around Him lie the tools of creation. The 'Lute' for creating passions; the 'fancy' to help Him in creation; the 'flights' of imagination to give man what he needs the most. The Lover's eyes poured on the flower, man, the most important component of His creation. God loves us all and, hence, the reference to Him as a 'doting Lover'.

It is not that there can be no other interpretations possible for this short piece selected from the poem. We may need also to brood over the strange positing of opposites which explains Eliot's observation about the 'devotional' poets showing 'limited awareness' in their work. Let us reconsider the poem afresh. The narrator saw 'Eternity' at night and it was luminiscent and bright - pure and endless too. Light can be appreciated only when darkness engulfs us. Moreover, to a man who is born in Time and not out of it, 'Eternity' is only an abstraction, a myth, in the absence of faith. Man is used to the temporal world. He can appreciate the past, his history, only if he has been brought up in a good tradition. That alone would help him fortify himself against the onslaught of doubt and distrust. So, the scenario in the poem is one wherein we have two rings: one static (Eternity) and the other dynamic, moving (Time); one pure, endless, calm and bright 'light' and the other moving in growing circles, spheres, moving like a vast shadow in the
void wherein it was hurled. The abyss, the void, is thus
the shadow of Time. So far so good. But what has a 'doting
Lover' to complain 'in his queintest strain' of 'wits'
souring 'delights' with everything that mattered to him
lying scattered around, 'his dear Treasure' due to his
pre-occupation with 'a flower'? The flower is a symbol of
love and beauty. And here is the lover lost in both.

This is likely to be seen as the product of the
limited awareness of the poet. Vaughan is treating the
whole subject matter of poetry, the beauty of all creation,
remaining out of the bounds of general awareness. Were it
not for this limited awareness, the poem would have risen
to heights celebrating not only the creation of the world as
an act of Grace but would also have shown to us how Grace
has been invested into this creation itself. We would be
in a better position to appreciate this if we were to take
a close look at what Eliot says in Section IX of Choruses
from "The Rock" about the artist using formless stones to
create something new, imitating the process of creation. We
have Eliot telling us how

Out of the formless stone, when the artist
nites himself with stone,
Spring always new forms of life, from the soul
of man that is joined to the soul of stone;
Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all
that is living or lifeless
New forms of life are possible only when the artist unites himself with formless stone. In other words. These new forms emerge out of the meaningless practical shapes which get new form, new colour and new life only when it is 'joined with the artist's eye'. Also, when the souls of the stone and the artist merge; for, God had created man in his own image out of mud.

The third sense in which Eliot takes the term 'religious literature' is one which refers to any literary writing that is 'sincerely desirous of forwarding the cause of religion', or is a propagandist writing. T S Eliot comments that he has G K Chesterton's works Man Who Was Thursday and Father Brown in mind, both of which are deliberately and defiantly, Christian in a world 'which is definitely not Christian'. But so is the sermon of Archbishop Thomas Becket to the congregation in the Cathedral on Christmas Morning (in 1170) in Murder in the Cathedral, especially the middle portion. Becket says:

Beloved, we do not think of a martyr simply as a good Christian who has been killed because he is Christian:
for that would be solely to mourn.
we do not think of him simply as a
good Christian who has been elevated
to the company of the Saints: for that
would be simply to rejoice: and neither
our mourning nor our rejoicing is as
the world's is. 19

Becket can be seen here as trying to make a proper
distinction between a Christian martyr and a Christian who
has died as a Christian, that is, died an ordinary death.
The entire meaning revolves around the phrases we do not
think of a martyr simply as a good Christian 'who has been
killed because he is Christian' and 'who has been elevated to
the company of the Saints'. The two verbs: 'kill' and
'elevate' suggest a deliberately designed action. The real
meaning hinges on the adverbial 'simply'. If it is simply
his killing or elevation, a Christian may not be said to be
a martyr.

Eliot attempts to define what a 'martyr' is and what
he or she is not. The killing of a person because he is
simply a good Christian or his or her elevation as a Saint
for the same reason, does not make a Christian a martyr.
Our idea here is not to get into the definitive part of the
work but to show how the sermon is deliberately and defiantly
Christian for the simple reason that it is a part of the sermon, a preaching. To a non-believer, to an unChristian mind, this might appear to be a propagandist writing which it is not. If at all, it is merely a reaffirmation of Faith. Becket is in the process of making up his mind, preparing himself and his flock, his congregation, for his ultimate act of seeking martyrdom. However, to a mind that refuses to see the preaching in this light, it would appear to be a fine example of an attempt made at 'forwarding the cause of' Christianity.

T S Eliot does not apparently approve of any of these three senses in which we take the term 'religious literature'. Terming the relation between 'religion' and 'literature' to be one of 'conscious and limited relating', Eliot stresses his choice of the product of such a relation where the literature is 'unconsciously' Christian. (Eliot's emphasis). One would not be able to discern a 'conscious and limited' attempt to project a Christian fervour in the portion of Section IX of Choruses from "The Rock" quoted earlier. The discourse hardly gives the feeling of being Christian because the belief is given words to in a very indirect manner that appears very philosophical rather than religious. The fact remains, however, that the portion quoted is indeed a good example of the work being rooted in a sound and vibrant tradition, dynamic in nature.
III

'Art for art's sake', as a theory, leads to 'aestheticism' or the idea of treating life 'in the spirit of art'. The popular belief is that art imitates life against which the aesthetes believe that life imitates art. And, hence, there was an attempt to bring literature to a condition of what is called 'pure art' — something that was believed to be true of music. Baudelaire, Gautier, Hegel and others were the philosophers from the continent who influenced writers like Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe. The result is there for all to see.

R V Johnson (1969: 12) has discussed the three applications of the term 'aestheticism': (i) as a view of art, (ii) as a view of life, and (iii) as a practical tendency in literature and the arts. Johnson notes that the first corresponds to 'arts for art's sake'; the second corresponds to the idea of treating experience 'in the spirit of art' purely as material for aesthetic enjoyment; and the third represents 'a tendency going away not only from 'moral didacticism' but also from the artist who is neither speaking for or to his age. It was a response in defiance 'of any suggestion that the value of a poem consisted in its relevance to the conduct of life' and this is a stand taken later and is very close to the position taken by Eliot.
Stolnitz (1960: 352), discussing the tenets of the theory of 'art for art's sake', notes how the phrase sums up epigrammatically the concept of 'aesthetic disinterestedness'. Under this theory, 'the work exists to be appreciated for its own sake.' Secondly, it was seen as 'a protest against those who would make art subservient to some other goal.' Thirdly, it was seen as 'directed against the moralist' emphasizing 'the psychological and social consequences of art', and announcing 'the liberation of art from didacticism and propaganda'. Fourthly, it was seen as 'a rejoinder to those who charge that art is "useless".' Fifthly, it was seen as 'a rallying cry for artists and critics' in rebellion against commercialism. The artists and critics saw this as 'the direct, self-sufficient enjoyment of aesthetic value.' Lastly, it 'came to stand for a whole way of life' and thus was seen to have become 'one of the theories of "art and morality".'

It was soon believed to have an ideal of what Stolnitz calls and 'almost childlike simplicity'.

Our immediate need for discussing 'pure literature' stems out of the fact that we have seen aestheticism as something that lies on the outer periphery of the circle of experience. On the other end of the periphery lies 'religious literature' which was the subject of discussion in Section II of this chapter. But let us get on with 'pure literature'. Wimsatt, Jr and Brooks (1959: 480) note that Baudelaire
'comes out often enough against the current formulations of pure-art theory'. Baudelaire sees in the views 'of the school of art for art's sake', what he calls 'the childish utopianism' which he saw in its ruling out of morals. He goes on to note that such utopianism was 'doomed to sterility', for he found that the theory 'was a flagrant defiance of human nature' — a movement that could be convicted of heresy. What was to be the way out of this situation? The answer, according to Wimsatt, Jr and Brooks, is in the work of Baudelaire, L'Art Romantique, wherein he says,

Morality does not appear with a formal title.
Morality simply penetrates and blends itself with art as completely as with life. The poet is a moralist in spite of himself, simply through the overflowing abundance of his nature.

We must not overlook the fact that Baudelaire's view came into prominence when 'art for art's sake' was almost a dogma. Eliot notes in his Selected Essays that he believes 'Baudelaire has been called a fragmentary Dante' and, knowing how good Eliot thought Dante was, this can only be taken to mean a high-rating of the philosopher.

Oscar Wilde in his "Preface" to The Picture of Dorian Cray says, 'The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim'. Noting
has 'the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium', Wilde goes on to argue that

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved. No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style. No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything. 38

There are three observations about the artist which are, in fact, generalisations. No artist (i) desires to prove anything, (ii) has ethical sympathies, and (iii) is ever morbid. In other words, Wilde at once takes away from the artist the raison d'être for his work. If the artist does not desire to prove anything, why does he write at all? There is a purpose behind all writing. If the artist has no ethical sympathies, what is the social utility of the work? What would the author be doing if he were not to allow his ethics to be projected into his work? And ethics are always social in their connotation. Never wholly individual. Again, if no artist is ever morbid, would he/doing justice to his work as one who is concerned with projecting reality?

These questions perhaps did not carry as much weight for Wilde as they did and do for others. His defence against opposition to the prescribed regimen is clear. If an artist
were to try to prove something, he may end up proving untrue things true. Similarly, if he were to show ethical sympathies, he would be highlighting 'an unpardonable mannerism of style'. Lastly, if he were to be morbid, he would end up being partial. The argument does not end there. Wilde opines that thought and language are the instruments of art much in the same way as vice and virtue are the materials for him. In form, all art is the art of the musician; and in feeling, it is the craft. Moreover, Wilde argues that 'All art is at once the surface and symbol.' It is perilous indeed either to go beneath the surface or read the symbol because art really mirrors the spectator and not life. Wilde is finally led to conclude that 'All art is quite useless'.

Elsewhere, Wilde notes the stages of the growth of art insofar as its connection with life is concerned. The first stage is the beginning of Art 'with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent.' The second stage is reached when life's fascination with it becomes real. What happens as a result is that 'Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms.' This is the point when it 'is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative and ideal treatment.' And, finally, in the third stage,
'Life gets the upper hand and drives Art out into the wilder­ness.' It is thus a gradual movement of Art as an abstraction to Art remodelling life to the upstaging of Art by life. What Wilde makes Vivian say here is suggestive of how art gets transformed into a representation of life which it is not, for the exponents of 'pure art' and 'pure literature' believe that life is a representation of art. Hence, Vivian tells us that the upstaging of art by life is the true 'decadence' which 'we are now suffering'. Turning art into life robs art of its natural function which is to help art reach the kind of perfection that music has. This is a point that is of vital importance to the users of art.

In "The Priority of Art", there emerge from a discussion between Vivian and Cyril, the doctrines of the new aesthetics which, we believe, are central to the concept of pure literature drawn from the concept of pure art. The main points are as follows:

1. Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life... and develops purely on its own lines.

2. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals.

3. Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates life.

4. Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.
Let us take these doctrines for a close look one after the other. In asserting that Art never expresses anything but itself, Wilde takes away from it any reference to any agency outside of it which might be said to be shaping it. Its perfection being within itself, search for it outside its framework is meaningless. Hence, judging it by 'any external standard of resemblance' might not bear any fruit. Moreover, Vivian says of the first doctrine that it 'is the principle of my new aesthetics' and goes on to indicate the area where the two points of view: his and that of Pater, differ. The fact that Art never expresses anything but itself is, to Vivian, more important than Pater's preoccupation with the 'vital connection between form and substance'.

Moving on to the second doctrine, we find that there are more complications ahead. If it is true that all bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals, then the divorce between Art and Life, and Art and Nature is better granted. The crunch is in elevating Life and Nature into ideals. Aesthetes of the school of thought, to which Wilde belonged, seemed to have erred in putting a legal seal on such a divorce. Without any reference to its utility and the medium and the material, Art would lose all its relevance. Perfection of the artifact lies in Art itself according to the aesthetes and the world 'fancies that it is its own history... being told to it, its own spirit... finding expression in a new form.'
Why this happens can be explained very easily. Time is linear in the Western philosophies and that may be true about historical time. But mythical time is always cyclical. Mircea Eliade talks about the myth of eternal return. What seems to happen is that, given a similar set of conditions and subjects, a stimulus is likely to produce the same or a near-identical response. For instance, when spectators in an auditorium or a theatre watch Thomas Becket go through trying times before embracing martyrdom, they can at once recall other similar occurrences in history depending upon the nature of their familiarity with such other events in history. That was only to show how the position of the aesthetes’s second doctrine is shaky. Relating art to life might bring in the question of morals and ethics and, similarly, relating it to Nature might bring in the question of the place of the supernatural in it among other things.

The third doctrine is equally controversial. Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This might, on the face of it, appear to be true and is quite apparently romantic in its appeal. If art begins with abstract decoration, pure imagination and pleasurable work, then it is quite unlike life. One is reminded of the fate Emma meets with in Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary due to her inability to come to terms with her life as it is and her romantic idealisation of what a man-woman relationship involves. Flaubert had to
face prosecution for having written and published the novel. The point of attack lay in what was considered to be obscenity in it and the 'only too apparent' approval of Emma's actions. Emma's romantic fantasies or her effort to live her life much in the same way as the romantic heroines of the novels, she had read, lead in company of their handsome, immaculately dressed and perfumed lovers. What would happen if we consider this merely as an example of the best in art, and if life were to imitate it? We would have anarchy. The society would be torn apart violently. The very basis of the web of social and familial relationship would stand uprooted. Emma is destroyed while trying to copy what is idealized in the novels she had been reading. The same is likely to be the fate of anyone who might want to emulate the example of Emma. We shall rest content with saying this about Madame Bovary here.

One would like to examine the statement further. Art begins with purely imaginative and pleasurable work. So goes the statement. And such a work is seen as dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. One may raise objections to such a position on the ground that what is unreal and non-existent may be violative both of beauty and truth. At the same time, if it were to be seen as something that has nothing to do with morality and ethics, it is more than likely to be robbed of its purpose. No doubt Wilde saw all art as useless. Maybe, this was what was at the back of his mind but since it did not
meet with the requirements or could be brought within its broad framework, Wilde has had to concede that all art is really useless.

Lastly, a little discussion on the fourth doctrine may be of order. We are told that lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art. This is a statement that is hard to understand and must, therefore, be challenged. Telling lies or spreading canards or even the telling of beautiful untrue things can hardly be said to be the aim of Art. 'Art', as a word used in the sense in which it has been used here, means 'application of skill to production of beauty (esp. visible beauty) and works of creative imagination'.  

Art cannot but have a point of reference. It does not take a genius to grant that the aesthetics of the Greek masters like Plato and Aristotle is based on the idea of imitation. The work of an artist is twice removed from reality because it does not and, maybe, cannot replicate the real creation. And, hence, art is a reference to the 'application of skill' whose ultimate aim is the 'production of beauty'. 'Application' is a key word in the phrase. The word means among other things (i) the act of applying, administering or using and (ii) use of anything with special regard to something else. In the present case, it would mean using a certain skill. But what kind of a skill is expected to be demonstrated by the artist? Skill is related to expertise.
Thus, the phrase, 'application of skill', simply means using or putting to use one's knowledge as an expert or the craft mastered in order to produce beauty, and works of creative imagination. A literary work would be devoid of all its worth if the kind of imagination used is not creative.

Pure imagination or imagination in itself cannot lead to creativity. It may lead to pleasant excesses — good to hear about but incredible insofar as their effect is concerned. Aestheticism was a reaction to Romanticism which made allowances for such excesses. One need not labour this point any further. But creative imagination is a wholly different issue. Whatever is creatively-imagined must also be plausible or else it might not command any support, or fail simply to compel any belief. Take this bit out of art and you denude it and expose it to the charge that it is lifeless. An artist needs to tell us beautiful things but these must also be true or have the appearance of what is true. Perfection of the kind reached in music is easier to understand and to accept because it is something that has to do with our psyche or even with our collective unconscious. But the truth is that such perfection may not be possible in literary art.

Walter Pater, another exponent of pure art, writing in *The Renaissance*, notes that

the more matter of a poem, for instance, its subject, namely its given incidents or
situation... should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees.\textsuperscript{58}

Monsman (1967: 10) says in a footnote that form means 'outline, shape, general rule'.\textsuperscript{59} He has made pointed reference to Pater's definition of form as quoted in Bernard Bosanquet.\textsuperscript{60} A sentence, an argument, the metre in poetry or the type of poem put together yield something 'superficial, general, diagrammatic'. Pater avers that it is our insight, when it is pushed home into the order and connection of parts including the way in which the parts are themselves affected, then the form becomes what he calls the 'very material'. We have also something along these lines in his \textit{Appreciations}. Pater argues:

If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art.\textsuperscript{61}
How this perfection can be achieved has been shown clearly by Monsman's footnote. Perfection is made possible when our insight is brought to bear on the order and the mode affecting the parts. Hence, Baudelaire's view that

The first requirement for a healthy art is a belief in an ordered whole of experience.
I challenge anybody to show me a single work of imagination which satisfies the requirements of beauty and is at the time pernicious. 62

There is a certain identical streak in both these points of view. However, there is a lot of difference too. Whereas Pater is talking about connections between parts of a structured whole: the outline, shape of or general rule involving a work, Baudelaire is talking about this very same connection, though implicitly, especially with regard to experience. If, as Baudelaire expects of it, a healthy art were merely to be based on 'a belief in an ordered whole of experience' as a first prerequisite, then, it is clear that everything else would take off from this point. Baudelaire explains in the preceding part of the statement as a whole that a work would be pernicious if it were to distort 'the patterns of living reality'. He can be seen as making the finer distinction between a given 'reality' in itself and what he chooses to call 'living reality'. And reality can be said to be a 'living' one only if it is vibrant and has the inherent capacity for a certain
'dynamism'. The differences are only too obvious to need any repetition.

IV

This is precisely the point when one would like to ask: what is T S Eliot's response to religious and pure literature? The answer to the question about Eliot's response to religious literature is to be found in several of Eliot's works. "Religion and Literature", The Idea of a Christian Society, Notes towards the Definition of Culture and the like are only some notable examples.

About religious literature Eliot has this to say in "Religion and Literature":

1. the Bible has had a literary influence upon English literature not because it has been considered as literature, but because it has been considered as the report of the Word of God. And the fact that men of letters now discuss it as 'literature' probably indicates the end of its 'literary' influence.63 (Eliot's emphases).

2. 'religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry: the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter. Who is leaving out what men consider their major passions,
and thereby confessing his ignorance of them. (Eliot's emphases).

3. the literary works of men who are sincerely desirous of forwarding the cause of religion: that which may come under the heading of Propaganda.

Eliot confesses that he is concerned in the essay not with religious literature but with the relation between religion and literature. There is another illuminating remark of Eliot's in "The Modern Mind" which calls for the attention of any serious-minded reader of poetry (read: 'literature' also). He says:

Any theory which relates poetry very closely to a religious or a social scheme of things aims, probably, to explain poetry by discovering its natural laws. (Eliot's emphasis).

He goes on to assert that 'poetry can recognise no such laws' that are a part of what he calls its 'binding by legislation'. (Eliot's emphasis).

Let us now turn to Eliot's response to 'pure literature'. In the essay "Arnold and Pater" published in 1930, Eliot discusses the theory of "art for art's sake". Expressing his reservations about considering it a theory at all, he notes:
The theory...of 'art for art's sake' is still valid in so far as it can be taken as an exhortation to the artist to stick to his job; it was never valid for the spectator, reader or auditor. 68

Discussing the developments in this area in the context of the history of the theory, later in the essay, Eliot goes on to remark that

The right practice of 'art for art's sake' was the devotion of Flaubert or Henry James; Pater is not with these men, but rather with Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold, if some distance below them. 69

But that is not all. The theory comes in for comment once again in "Conclusion" to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism where Eliot records that

The doctrine of 'art for art's sake', a mistaken one, and more advertised than practised contained this true impulse behind it, that it is a recognition of the error of the poet's trying to do other people's work. 70
The "conclusion" to UPUC is dated 31-3-1933, that is, it was published three years after the publication of the essay, "Arnold and Pater". What conclusions might one draw from these observations about T S Eliot's attitude to the doctrine or theory (whatever we might choose to call it) of 'art for art's sake'? Eliot holds that (a) it is still valid as an exhortation to the artist to stick to his job, (b) it had no validity whatsoever for the spectator, reader, or auditor, (c) its right practice was the devotion of Flaubert or Henry James, (d) it is a mistaken doctrine more advertised than practised, and (e) the doctrine is a recognition of the error of the poet overstepping his jurisdiction.

One look at the points summarised above should be enough to convince us that the validity of the doctrine is limited to the practising artist and not the ones for whom it was created. The devotion of its practitioners like Gustave Flaubert and Henry James is perhaps the right practice. The need for the 'doctrine' arose out of the recognition of the error of the poet not doing his job the way he was expected to. The artists, who come up for special mention in the essay, are Gustave Flaubert and Henry James both of whom were well-known novelists of their times, not poets.
'Pure literature' was born out of the quest for freedom from both science and religion. Once freed from these two, literature is neither expected to have precision of the sciences nor any moral overtones that any connection with religion would necessarily contain. Discussing the function of a literary review, Eliot seems to suggest in one of his famous essays, "The Function of a Literary Review", that it is to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature and, at the same time, to exhibit the relations of literature - not to life, as something contrasted to literature, but all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life. Eliot, while talking about the purest form of literature, argues that 'even the purest literature is alimented from non-literary sources, and has non-literary consequences. Pure literature is a chimera of sensation; admit the vestige of an idea and it is already transformed.' One cannot find fault with Eliot for appearing to suggest that other varieties of literature are similarly alimented from non-literary sources.

'Art for art's sake' became fashionable in France around 1884 AD, that is, four years before Eliot's birth. Pure literature originates in what has been recognized as 'pure poetry' which came into existence as a reaction against romanticism. For the earlier exponents, it signified liberation from eloquence and rhetoric and the establishment
of the supremacy of music in poetry. Interestingly, it was A C Bradley who argued in his lecture, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake", published in 1901, that 'pure poetry' was the same as the identity of 'form and content'. And that is an important point he made.

In the famous "Conclusion" of Walter Pater's The Renaissance, Pater writes:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end....To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life....While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion...that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses. [Our] one chance lies...in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. The finest source of such experience is the love of art for its own sake....For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.73

What Pater says here is a clear indication that he gives weight to experience in itself rather than the fruit of
experience. Success in life, says Pater, is dependent on maintaining the ecstasy of the experience. The important part of the sentence that appears in the next quote is 'we may well grasp at any exquisite passion...that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses'. (added emphasis). The experience may yield 'any exquisite passion' which is likely to be grasped by the reader. However, as Eliot tells us in "The Modern Mind",

The 'experience' in question may be the result of a fusion of feelings so numerous, and ultimately so obscure in their origins, that even if there be communication of them, the poet may hardly be aware of what he is communicating.74

What happens if that were to be the case? Pater has no direct answer to such questions, but there is a suggestion forthcoming: 'one chance lies...in getting as many pulsations (feelings?) as possible into the given time'. (parenthesis supplied). However, there is a difficulty here: the experience concerned may be the fusion of feelings quite numerous and obscure in their origin that the artist may hardly be aware of what he is communicating.
As for the origin of these 'pulsations', Pater notes that it 'is the love of art for its own sake'. What does Eliot have to say about such claims? Eliot holds that the theory of 'art for art's sake', which he concedes is 'still valid...as an exhortation to the artist to stick to his job', was never valid for the spectator, reader or auditor. The reason being that he considers it to be a 'mistaken' doctrine which was based on the premise that 'it is a recognition of the error of the poet's trying to do other people's work'. Pater, who seems to have anticipated such objections, counters with the argument that art proposes to give us nothing but 'the highest quality' to our moments of enjoyment simply for those moments' sake. But the truth is that 'only the exceptional reader', as Eliot puts it, 'comes to classify and compare his experiences' and, to be able 'to respond properly to a new situation', the readers must have a wholesome perception of the totality of experience. For, those whose experience is 'limited' are 'always liable to be taken in by the sham or the adulterate article.'

Having said that, we would like to go back to the question we had raised in the beginning of this chapter. To recapitulate, this question pertains to what Smidt calls 'an underlying consistency' which reveals itself when we undertake a thorough examination of Eliot's thought on
'the primacy of form'. Let us take a look at how consistent
he is.

Smidt (1961:48) quotes Eliot's statement on the
importance of the distinction between form and substance,
on the one hand, and between material and attitude, on the
other. Eliot holds that in the perfect poet, they are
the same thing. He argues that thus it is always true to
say that the form and content are the same thing as much as
it is to say that they are different things. Smidt avers
that 'we can proceed to cull such statements' as 'from the
poetic process a masterpiece now and then results, "in which
medium and material, form and content, are indistinguishable".' On the bases of these and such other observations, Smidt comes
to the conclusion that

Eliot's basic idea seems to be that beauty
of form provides a stimulus which, as far
as emotional, sensual or intellectual content
goes, is undifferentiated. And each reader
is allowed to differentiate the meaning to
himself by his particular responses, much
as is commonly done in the case of music.

It is true that Eliot is wholly consistent in theorizing
about the method of and importance attached to the difficult
task of arriving at the 'meaning' of the poem. And, a great
deal, in the way of meaning, belongs to prose rather than to poetry', asserts Eliot.

To sum up, then, T S Eliot rejects both 'religious' and 'pure' varieties of literature for the simple reason that both these are intensely what we may call artist-centred varieties: the former because, by giving rein to 'religious' feelings on a personalized level, the artists are likely to attract censure as being tentative proposers in terms of their 'value' or the result of 'limited awareness' or, worst still, mere 'propagandist' writing. The latter variety stretches this to its limits by stressing too vigorously on the fact that it is not art that imitates life, but vice-versa, requiring the artist to aim at superhuman perfection.
References and Notes:


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


7. Ibid., p. 419.


10. Ibid., p. 391.

11. Ibid., p. 392.

13. Ibid.


15. Ibid. See Chapter III of Book Twelve.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.


34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 481.


38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.


43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 20.

47. Ibid., p. 23.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.


52. Ibid., p. 22.

53. Ibid., pp. 22-23. This can happen only when a work is steeped in tradition, according to T S Eliot.

57. Ibid., p. 1266.
59. Ibid.
62. By Whatever other name one may choose to call it, it is bound to remain the same. Please refer to Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, p. 481.
64. Ibid. (We could perhaps even reword it to read 'the religious writer is not one who is treating the whole subject matter of literature in a religious spirit but a writer who is dealing with a confined part of this
subject matter: who is leaving out what men consider their major passions, and thereby confessing his ignorance of them."

65. Ibid., p. 391.
66. T S Eliot, UPUC, p. 139.
67. Ibid.
68. T S Eliot, SE, p. 442.
69. Ibid., p. 443.
70. T S Eliot, UPUC, p. 152.

72. Eliot uses parts to represent the whole. A point that was made in one of the earlier chapters.


75. T S Eliot, SE, p. 442.
77. T S Eliot, UPUC, pp. 18-19.


82. Ibid., p. 49.