In January 1982 a new poem by the veteran American poet Richard Eberhart appeared entitled 'Old Dichotomy – Choosing Sides'. Here are a few lines from it:

Why don't you like the wild cry of the madman
Who does not know what makes him cry as he does?

Because Aristotle said the world was measurable,
Took leaves off every tree, and measured them.

He began the scientific method. But the wild man
Was perhaps older, subjective, would scoff at the objective.

We have to choose between the wild in us, and the sober,
The intensity of genius may be best.¹

It is, to be frank, not a very good poem; indeed it is almost a parody of one kind of Dichotomy, one way of taking sides. but it provides a good way into our subject.

There is a story that Reinhold Niebuhr and William Temple were together at a small theological meeting.² Niebuhr had been talking about 'paradox' – the paradoxical nature of this and that. Finally Temple intervened with 'Well, no doubt paradoxical to all of us, but not paradoxical to Dr Niebuhr, for he appears to understand it?' 'No, no,' said Niebuhr vigorously, 'the ultimate paradox of existence.' 'Surely,' said Temple blandly, 'Surely Dr Niebuhr does not expect us to imagine that the Blessed Trinity suffer
from eternal perplexity in their contemplation One of Another? We hear of no further discussion; perhaps the company dissolved into laughter. But in fact Dr Niebuhr could have had the last word: he could surely have said in reply, ‘Ah, William: but you see only a Hegelian like you could find the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity non-paradoxical’.

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The debate between the Hegelian and the Paradoxical, which could also be called that between the Essentialist and the Kierkegaardian, or perhaps in more immediately contemporary terms between the Structuralist and the Deconstructionist (unless I have gravely misunderstood this last altercation) – these debates are very old, very confused, and perhaps by now very tedious. But the relation of Literature to Commitment is on any view of it going to be affected by what sort of philosophical, or post-philosophical, or even anti-philosophical assumptions may lie behind the commitment.

Let us start with yet another version of the debate: that between ‘Content’ and ‘Form’; or ‘Life’ and ‘Art’. This, too, is a tired affair; yet in various forms it keeps turning up. And since it can be put in concrete terms we will start here and return to ‘Niebuhr versus Temple’ later.

In 1874, Tom Hughes added a Preface to the Sixth Edition of his extremely popular novel, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). He commented on the correspondence he had received since the first publication.

Several persons, for whose judgment I have the highest respect, while saying very kind things about the book, have added, that the great fault of it is ‘too much preaching;’ but they hope I shall amend in this matter should I ever write again. Now this I must distinctly decline to do. Why, my whole object in writing at all was to get the chance of preaching! When a man comes to my time of life [he was fifty when he wrote this] and has his bread to make, and very little time to spare, is it likely that he will spend almost the whole of his yearly vacation in writing a story just to amuse people! I think not. My sole object in writing was to preach to boys: if ever I write again, it will be to preach to some other age. (pp. xii–xiv)