"Life and Times" of Theory: Identity, Agency and the Will to Justice

Chapter I

Introduction: A Course of Change

Literary scholarship and pedagogy underwent tremendous changes in the United States during the second half of the Twentieth Century. This is a historical legacy that is not only recognized and shared throughout the world today, but also well documented by scholars in the field. Scholars have identified predominant changes in several areas during these years. For instance, literary historian, critic and theorist Rene Wellek, describes the changes taking place in literary scholarship while recollecting the Princeton of 1927-1928, as a place where “eminent scholars seemed hardly aware of the issues of criticism, and the Yale of 1962, where criticism and its problems are our daily bread and tribulation” (Wellek 317). Citation indexes compiled during these years such as The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), which are based on citations in scholarly publications of relevant fields, are valuable references that reveal a rise in popularity among certain thinkers, and a sustained heightened interest in specific discursive matters relating to them (Megill 135-141). Journals such as Diacritics, Critical Inquiry, Social Text, and many others of similar content were launched to accommodate the “too many other interesting things coming in” to the area of literary scholarship, thus responding to the rising debates which were percolating in literary studies and which seemed to constitute a new field (Mitchell 613).

The changes taking place in the classrooms of English departments and the course content of literary studies, were striking during this time. For instance, departmental statistics from the English department of the University of Virginia, point to the falling interest in studies in poetry and drama among students, between the 1950s and the 1970s. The actual path may have been more erratic and complex than any statistic could provide, nevertheless, the tendency is clear, that by the 1960s in campuses across the US, English literature began to accommodate more contemporary material,
almost at an equal share with the "traditional" literature of drama and poetry. Course titles such as Literature of Fantasy, Afro-American Folklore, Women and Literature, the Literature of Revolution and others, found tremendous popularity among students ("English").

The same period also witnessed an increase in the number of students in English departments, while some institutions more successfully than others, found increases in their endowment for literary studies ("English"). It seemed to be the 'best of times' for the Arts and Humanities since the Second World War in the United States - at least for most. Ample records throughout the 1950s point to tremendous reshuffles also taking place in faculty appointments, where some institutions were striving to recruit "nationally-renowned faculty members", while enforcing "early" retirements upon tenured professorships ("English"). An exceptional evidence of the former can be found in the movement of Paul de Man from Harvard in the 1950s to Cornell and Johns Hopkins in the 1960s and finally to his appointment as professor at Yale in the 1970s (Atlas, "The Case of Paul de Man").

By the 1970s, it was clear that a new interest in the field of literary studies, by the name of literary theory had emerged and began gaining dominance based on recurring debates and discourses. The most prominent institutionalization of literary theory takes place in the English department of Yale in the 1970s. Although many of the non-"traditional" contemporary courses mentioned above, already included readings in narratology, language based critical techniques, historiography, and other areas - many of which incorporated readings in formalism, structuralism and poststructuralism; it is clearly in the 1970's that evidence can be found of courses with titles such as "literary theory" or courses which incorporated the new areas of theory as part of its classroom pedagogy and curriculum.

It may be interesting to note that some of the courses offered at Yale during the 1970s, include letter titled courses such as, 'Literature X': "Man and His Fictions," a course with structuralist and narratological leanings; 'Literature Y': which was an overview of twentieth century literary theory; and 'Literature Z': founded in 1972 by
Peter Brooks, Alvin Kernan, and Michael Holquist, as an undergraduate version of comparative literature (Redfield "Appendix I"). In 1977 when 'literature Z' was taught by Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman, the tentative topics included: 'The History and Taxonomy of Rhetoric', 'Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism', 'Theories of Grammar and their Application to Literary Studies', 'Introduction to Literary Semiology', 'Prosody and Narratology', 'Problems of Literary Historiography; History and Literature', 'History of the Study of Literature and Sociology of Literary Scholarship (Redfield "Appendix II")).

The English and comparative literature department at Yale thus became a locus for the study of literary theory. Paul de Man along with Geoffrey Hartman and others, became part of scholars collectively known as the Yale Deconstructionists. The 1970s therefore also points to the rising importance of poststructuralism in some of the leading Liberal Arts institutions in America and the establishment of literary theory as an integral part of contemporary literary scholarship (Atlas, "The Case of Paul de Man"). This "American interest" in theory, subsequently disseminated in English departments around the world; as no problem of literature has ever been confined to one institution, or even one country. This popularity of literary theory continued well into the early 1990s.

Since the late 1990s however, literary theory as a part of literary scholarship reached a certain ebb in both its production and acceptability and especially, more so, in the past few years. Closer to our times, writing in 2004 and 2003 respectively, critics such as Jim Hanson and even W. J. T. Mitchell (founding editor of Critical Inquiry) believe that there is a renewed interest to "a more subtle commitment to form" in North American academic circuits. In fact, Hanson clearly states that "formalism is making

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1 In the Indian subcontinent, Jadavpur University was among the first institutions to set up a Comparative Literature department to accommodate these changes taking place in literary scholarship. The University of Delhi on the other hand revised its English syllabi only in 2001, which incorporated readings in specific areas of literary theory. However, well before the change in the syllabus, students were introduced to theory through classroom lectures, tutorials and supplementary readings assigned by instructors. Another instance of being "informed" of the wave of theory can be extrapolated from journal subscriptions. For instance, all institutional libraries dedicated to English studies in the Indian Subcontinent, with no exception, have at least some issues of the journals mentioned above, and many continue to be regular subscribers to these journals. These examples suggests the interest that theory commands even today in universities in locations other than the West.
a comeback after decades of apparent exile at the successive hands of structuralists in the 1960s, poststructuralists in the 1970s and 1980s and the various historicist schools of the 1990s" (Hanson 663). Has the time come, after five decades, for another institutional reshuffle — maybe this time on a more global scale?

Towards the end of the 1990's there is evidence of an outburst of scholarship on previously marginal, culture specific ethnic and political identity studies being done. Once again, citation indexes, institutional course curriculum, course selection by students, faculty appointments, article selections and on going debates in journals can all be used as *prima facie* evidence of this "outburst".

To speak of identity is a counter intuitive measure in relation to poststructuralist thought, in which identity is seen to be never static but always in play, and therefore constantly *becoming*, but never achieving the point needed for definition. Identity is always deferred in representation in poststructural thought. Poststructuralism of course has dominated literary theory to a point where literary theory becomes synonymous to poststructuralism. And yet, in English literary scholarship today, we see a renewed and heightened interest and a subsequent institutionalization of identity studies with the entry of areas such as African-American literature, Indian writings in English, Chicana-Chicano literature, subaltern and translation studies, eco and cyber feminism along with other culture and gender specific areas of inquiry.

A collective identity can be thrust upon a group, through branding, by means of a hegemonic process or a tyrannical process. A collective *political* identity however, is more of a self-defining concept based on selected criteria by groups that have already formed a sense of their own agency. The above mentioned areas are well-defined areas from the position of their respective well-defined criteria. I am suggesting only the very obvious here. That a Salman Rushdie novel will not appear under the heading of African-American literature, especially when the criterion of Indian writing in English is present. This will be the case even at the point where the field of literary studies is at its "internally-contradictory" best! In other words, there is
something quite foundational about identity studies, something which anti-foundational literary theory may prefer to reject, or at least deem unimportant.

In the English departments, therefore, on the one hand we have, or rather had literary theory creating a distinct world order of the melting pot, the multiculturalists, the cosmopolitan and the global, and on the other hand, now, we see very local, specific articulations of the politics of collective groups that are not really concerned with the latter more “homogenizing” expressions. These ‘renewed’ areas in their articulation, are trying to understand, interpret and are thus celebrating their specific conditions and lived experiences. This is not a bifurcation of the English department or of English studies per se. These are not two parallel streams running together, or even on a collision course. The change is on a path of an outward funneling spiral with some overlap. The melting pot, shifting towards the salad bowl, and further to a vegetable garden!

To term this shift from theory, as a philosophical pursuit to a more pragmatic ethnic identity based inquiry cannot be merely seen as a natural outgrowth of literary theory or simply a continuation of the theoretical enterprise that began in the mid-1960’s. Similarly, to call this shift as the requirement of our times – or a reaction against the lack of agency in theory, or a desperate attempt by a generation of literary theorists to find practice in theory becomes a hasty generalization, devoid of the intricate complexities that are involved.

In this change, there is a distinct resurfacing of ethical and political agency of the subject, with a bearing of pride and achievement. This appears enforced with an indication of a desirous future direction and projected path of literary inquiry. It is therefore imperative to study the ascent and descent of literary theory as a phenomenon in literary scholarship, and where the future of literary scholarship lies, vis-à-vis the theoretical quest of the last few decades. Questions such as: Who are involved with literary theory today? and the capacity of their involvement, the shift towards marginal identity studies, and to what extent do the “ghosts” of theory haunt these areas are questions that must also be weighed.
This does not suggest that the critique of literary theory – that has had a parallel history with the strengthening of theory in literary studies – has caught up with the “guardians” of theory. Rather, some of the stalwarts of theory are themselves, directing their inquiry into diverse areas of identity, culture and political inquiry. For example Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Henry Louis Gates Jr. Deleuze, Lyotard, and others who began with an epistemological mode of inquiry into literature and theory have shifted their gaze into marginal discourses themselves. Their works are not only profusely quoted in marginal and identity studies discourses such as cyber feminism, queer studies and others, but also lay the foundation for many of these areas. The later works of these theorists are quite unlike the projects of their teachers: J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and the work of the continental French theorists of the past few decades.

Therefore this “shift” in gaze that has become the dominant trend, for those who are involved with the theoretical enterprise in literature today – the change from theory to a study of identity politics – constitutes a shift from an ontological (what is – ) study of language and literature, spearheaded by the works of Derrida, to a teleological shift (purposiveness, namely: political, ethical) in literary studies, which have in turn lead to many of the present identity specific discourses and interdisciplinary studies in the classrooms of today.

At a closer view, the shift from an epistemological/ontological perspective to a teleological one is an engagement with the position of agency in systems of political representation. The question of agency – a highly contested issue on both sides of the theory wars – has never really been solved, and gains prominence in the new areas of identity studies where ethics, politics, economic power and justice become the subject of polemical debates. This move from a philosophical to a more practical method of criticism, that has shaped literary scholarship in the recent years can be viewed from the perspective of the agent consisting of a “moral will or a will to justice” rather than a will to power.
Consequently, literary theory, which had gained popularity over criticism and history (biography) — the two other central disciplines of literary scholarship (Wellek X) — is thus experiencing the decline while marginal and ethnic identity studies are gaining prominence in university curriculums where English Literature is being taught. Any lack, of an elaborate investigation of this important shift that is still taking place in the field of literary scholarship in our times would equate to gross negligence. In the course of this project, I will try to analyze the phenomena of literary theory and chronicle the events — polemical and social — that have led to the popularity of literary theory and its subsequent decline. This however, will only be the groundwork necessary to investigate that moment of shift (theory: a primarily anti-foundational epistemological pursuit; to identity politics: a more foundational teleological pursuit) that has recently taken shape and has lead to an opening up of the literary discourse to identity studies and interdisciplinary critique. It is in here that I believe lies the projected path of the future of literary studies, for such a study can even project light on the future course of literary scholarship.

This work cannot be seen as another text on the theory wars as it will not be as ambitious to take a concrete stand on either side of the war. It will in no way tread the path of arguing the end of theory, as a slump does not tantamount to an end, neither will this work be a forecast for another innings of literary theory to come. It will however explain, how the course of literary theory has been obstructed by identity politics in recent times. The purpose of the following section will be to outline a few of the crucial moments of necessity, success, conflict and contestation that literary theory has risen through. An elaborate analysis of these moments would be necessary before producing a thesis that will show the present day slump that theory is undergoing.

The Advent of Theory

The position of the inquirer as relative to the object of inquiry constitutes the setting for the pursuit of all knowledge. In literary scholarship, the object of inquiry has primarily been the literary text. The formulation of the text or its production vis-à-vis
the author (and the age in which it appears) and the conceptualization of the text by its audience constituting its readership becomes the focus of literature as a discipline.

The critical appreciation (criticism) of the object of inquiry, its history (author and age), and literary theory – that assesses literary judgment and therefore the inquirer – inevitably becomes the three central disciplines of literary scholarship. The popularity that theory had gained over criticism and history constitutes the rise of literary theory in literary scholarship. It gained dominance with a perspective shift from both the object of inquiry as text, and its readership, to “the vehicle of transfer”, namely, language. This comes as an important breach in the age-old philosophical debates of Thought versus Matter, which evidently becomes realigned by “the will to power”, as philosophy approached the modern age. Accordingly, in the modern era, language becomes the dominant episteme and eventually is studied as an idea – as in the epistemological study of language – and also as matter – the ontological study of language. This not only had a profound effect on literary studies but also forms the basis of literary theory, as it asserted the study of literature as a system of signs.

Consequently, the construction of literary theory as an area of literary studies can be explained as taking place in three steps. The first step as just mentioned occurs with the advent of linguistics, as a philosophical mode of inquiry within the structure of language. A result of which, bare words on a page – the text – its structure and placement, along with the semantics of the words became subject to critical analysis along with the context: traditionally the subject of inquiry for literary criticism. Literary studies and analysis was probably never meant to be the same again with the semantics and structure of language becoming the object of inquiry.

The second step in the direction of literary theory took shape with the seminars delivered by Lacan and followed by the subsequent establishment of psychoanalysis as a discipline. Language (the text) not only becomes the proposition of human thought but thought itself and especially the unconscious is understood as incorporating a language-like structure. Accordingly, along with the text and the context, this creates the possibility of a subtext – questioning the rationality of the
writer. Therefore, the mind – its sense perception and behaviour, like a text – becomes the possible object of a linguistical inquiry with Lacanian psychoanalysis.

A mode for analyzing the text, the context, and the subtext is later proffered by Derrida in the form of Deconstruction, and constitutes the third step towards the advent of literary theory. The continued re-reading of the text, the context and the sub-text without privileging any interpretation, becomes the task of the deconstructionist. With both the text as well as the human mind as an “object” structured through language, a new philosophical inquiry into the workings of language becomes the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, the structure of language, the structure of the working mind/thought and its process of structuring, is subjected to a de-structuring through a process of reading, re-reading and reconstruction. Such an activity is based not on a unifying process of representation but rather misrepresentation through a process of differentiation.

Such claims by Derrida naturally made a tremendous impact in areas of discursive linguistic activities, but its effect on literature was certainly lasting, for where else could the activity of language be more intense than in the literary! This took literary analysis, or criticism to an unprecedented quasi-scientific height. Unlike any earlier analysis, it privileged neither the text, nor the writer but rather the reading of the text. It aligned critical agency with the act of reading rather than the reading subject per se. This also becomes a point of contention and is said to be the inherent performative contradiction of deconstruction. As critics of Derrida argue that deconstruction: which is quite against the privileging of anything actually ends up privileging its own perspective.

Derrida’s theory constitutes a philosophy of language and where the “behaviour” of language becomes one of the primary objects of inquiry. Since the mode of literary expression is solely through language – written/oral/sign – it makes literature a fully language based activity. This however, did not make the philosophy of language necessarily become the philosophy of literature. Therefore, a central concept like deconstruction becomes not just a linguistic activity, but part of a more ontological
(metaphysical being and the mode of existence) study of language. It is somewhat distinct from the more epistemological (the nature and possibility of knowing) study of language conducted earlier by de Saussure. Through his philosophy of language and the linguistic activity of deconstruction, Derrida critiques a Western philosophical tradition based on the principle of a unifying reality while offering an alternative textual analysis based on a never-ending process of differentiation—marking the most important lead to literary theory.

Difference becomes the basis of deconstruction of both the (textual) subject and the (now textual) object as opposed to the similarities of each among themselves, with each subsequent reading. This has actually given rise to a certain construction (text, context, subtext) and politics of identity, based not on the unity of similarities but rather on the belief of a need for harmonization through an acceptance of difference. It is here that the ontological study of language, part of the modern discourse on language, takes on a teleological (moral and ethical purposeful goal) pursuit and has the greatest impact on the study of literature specifically in the USA where it first becomes part of the literary curriculum. This will constitute the theoretical path of my hypothesis and subsequent investigation, while the growth of theory in the US will concentrate on the socio-cultural aspect of its growth. Both the theoretical and the socio-cultural events that were taking place in the US are imperative to understand the rise and slump of literary theory as a phenomena.

**Rise of Theory: Sociological Necessity**

In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, theory exerted its most powerful effect, in the United States, “not least because it appeared to be both productive and liberating in its effects—it was seminal in the emergence of the battle for control over representations that was to become known as ‘political correctness’” (Motyl 617). It was however the events of the Mid 1960’s that paved the way for the tremendous popularity of literary theory in these subsequent years. With the grim episode of McCarthyism still lurking, the Civil Rights movement gaining in momentum, cold war rhetoric reaching its height with the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War, were all among the
flaming issues fiercely contested by the American Left, and became causes for mounting radical challenges.

However, the legacy of the intellectual trend of the 60s can be traced far back to Marxism, and in its variants, that were prevalent and dominated the intellectual discourse of the early 20th century. This was coupled with the nationalist political movements of the era. A close analysis of literary theory brings forth many complex ideologies at work, and also shows how difficult and complex the events were that actually placed literary theory into its disciplinary position that it has today.

By the late 1970’s and throughout the 1980’s this counterculture scene is distinctly absent, and where the pacifism of the Carter years is substituted by the saber-rattling paranoid conservative policies of Reagan. It cannot be coincidental that theory (specifically postmodernism) sees its rise in these interim years. The counterculture measures appearing in the streets of America during the previous decades are relegated to the classrooms of the institution, where anti-foundationalism becomes a safe substitute for activism. In the classrooms of English literature, this counterculture is directed as countercharge to the literary canons of “high modernist” Western metanarratives. This constitutes an unwritten policy of the containment of counterculture within the precincts of the academic institution, and more specifically the classroom of the United States. Of course, the boundaries of literary theory were not only contained by historical periodization. And by the 80’s theorization far exceeded periodization, leading to the debates that have come to be known as the theory wars (Motyl 617).

**Project and Definition: Before Theory!**

According to Rene Wellek, “literary theory” is the study of the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like, while the studies of concrete works of art are either “literary criticism” (primarily static in approach) or “literary history” (Wellek 1).
Jeremy Hawthorn, in the introduction to the Fourth Edition of *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* expresses surprise when he says:

> It is undeniable that the theory with which students of literature are expected to be conversant today comes from a far wider range of sources and disciplines than would have been the case twenty or thirty years ago. Not only is it associated with a range of different cultures and national literatures, but in many cases it is theory that is by no means primarily or exclusively concerned with literature or with literary criticism (Hawthorne V).

In any discipline, a voice can always be heard that cries for a need to keep one's focus upon the fundamentals, in the case of literary studies, the fundamental is the literary text, which in turn defines the discipline, and therefore demarcating the field of view or the scope and area of inquiry. Further in the paragraph Hawthorne goes on to express to his readers his diffidence in leaving out 'chaos theory'; the 'end of history'; 'uncertainty/complementarity'; the 'prisoner's dilemma' 'game; and synergy' from his glossary as he felt it was too "indirect to justify inclusion". His dilemma lies in the fact that he may have been wrong in doing so and may correct it, if a fifth edition is to appear. He then makes his own point very clear that "deciding what is appropriate for inclusion in a glossary of contemporary literary theory is by no means as straightforward as it once was" (Hawthorne V).

Inclusion and exclusion has always been a point of contention in all disciplines. For instance, in History, where does one begin teaching contemporary world history. Or where does medieval history end and modern history begin? Those who try to answer these questions must begin by first stating their positions, assumptions and perspectives, the methodology that they will apply, along with the reasons for the alternative that they choose to avoid. This in turn gives rise to schools of thought or groups who are bound through allegiance by a common practice in methodology and belief, and who collectively oppose others and defend their own positions through a polemical process.
At the college level and especially in English departments, a very similar extension of this very debate encircles around questions such as which literary texts should be taught at the graduate or undergraduate levels and so on. This goes back to the ancient debates of canon formation, which are not as ancient as the word may imply. This perennial problem is felt much more in literature than other disciplines. As literature is an easy subject about which anyone can have their own opinions, or so, many have come to believe! It is a large platform for anyone to begin with and not as cloistered as other areas of inquiry: 'science can do without poetry, but poetry cannot do without science', a scientist may exclaim! And then comes those who would collapse the terms remarking that: science is poetry or poetry is a science as well!

The problem of choice and categorization persists in the field. It does not in any way solve the problem of where to begin and what to leave for later or leave out completely. The question of drawing the line between theory and other areas of literary studies persists. However, to initiate inquiry a working postulate is necessary and the process of selection and the formation of criteria is imperative.

How much of literary theory is essentially of, or about literature, has raised many debates, which is why (here I detail him as my working example) Hawthorn, who is writing the glossary of literary theory is so careful and reticent and almost apologetic in his introduction. Not to mention the more reactionary view of; why have theory at all? Hawthorn's reference is to the 1970's, a time when the writings of Paul de Man, were gaining prominence in the US. Foucault and Derrida's seminal writings had become staples in some institutes. M. H. Abrams, Steven Greenblatt, J. Hillis Miller had been taking interest in European continental philosophy and more specifically deconstruction. Their writings were already popular. But it was a time, according to Hawthorn, that must have been easier (at least a little more) to compile a glossary of literary theory. And thus, thirty years later, from the 1970s (year 2000 onwards) Jeremy Hawthorn, Professor of Modern British Literature, in Norway, suggests a surge in literary theory, which makes it difficult to keep up with its interventions in the discipline. It is evident that in the last 20-30 years, literary theory has been quite an enigma in both content and in its presence in literary scholarship.
Hawthorne welcomes this intervention in the discipline and explains it as an “opening up of literary studies to a far wider range of intellectual influences”. (Hawthorn VI). Structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism. All have their birth outside the discipline of literature, unlike say, Romanticism or Modernism, which are relatively more comfortable in being accepted as movements in English literature.

Hawthorn further raises his concern that “more theory leaves less time for the reading of literary works”; a supposedly staple for literature students, culpable blasphemy to be slapped on anyone who would do otherwise. But he goes on to make his position clear: “I feel that the opening up of literary studies has made the discipline more intellectually exciting and more academically challenging. I have therefore absolutely no wish to turn the clock back” (Hawthorn VI). Hawthorn would be a part of the teachers of English literature or a group of academics, who obviously would hail the presence of literary theory in being a part of literary studies. However, he is careful to caution readers that literary theory cannot replace or compensate for “that set of skills and sensitivities that the careful reading, analysis, and interpretation of literary works bring with it” (Hawthorn VI). That it is not enough to read literary texts and literary theory and that the student of literature needs to have an “extensive acquaintance with literary criticism” (Hawthorn VII). And therefore not enough to make a critic: the pursuit of our discipline — as the pursuit of the study of history makes the historian, in the same manner that economists, are made through the study of economics.

This need for care and apology to advance theory or induct it into the discipline is gaining ground and shared by theorists of today, and was never really shared by earlier theorist (as I will illustrate in chapter II). This is the result of the detractors of theory, their raised voices gaining momentum and articulate sophistication over the years. These detractors’ greatest fear is that a small innovation may raise the tide and someday usurp the discipline, if it has not already done so — in which case it ought to be undone. If this is the fragile nature of our discipline that the words of the ‘ancestors’ or rather predecessors must be adhered to, that it needs to be kindled and
comforted from any innovation then, a discipline that breeds such insecurity is better not to have the stature of such a liberal all pervasive discipline at all. Actually, Literature is made to seem weak by such detractors of theory at times. Nevertheless, not all detractors make this discipline to appear as a pussyfooted weakling that has to be nurtured in the bowers of comfort. Some detractors interrogate the interventions of literary theory in the discipline, in theoretical and critical ways, which they would prefer to call, only critical. These debates are much more engaging, and interesting. They bring out the strength and the resilience of our discipline.

In other words, in this study, at times, I will position myself as a moderator and historian. I believe that by interrogating and investigating these debates, we can understand how much we really need literary theory (if at all), its dominant pursuit: whether it is an art or having its own agenda; and the path in which it is being redirected. All this, at a time and age when liberal arts is being relegated to the back seats by the majority of high school graduates, who are mostly opting for commerce and other non liberal arts subjects.

Referring back to Hawthorne’s preface, and by glossing over Hawthorn’s list of “Other useful glossaries and dictionaries” in print, it is evident that such numbers indicate a popular (I discuss the word popular, in more detail later) demand, and that the target audience of these books have been students of literature and more specifically English literature. For example, some of the well known titles mentioned by Hawthorn include: A Glossary of Literary Terms by M. H. Abrams. Dictionary of Literary Terms by J. A. Cuddon (later editions extended the title by including the phrase “And Literary Theory” along with the previous title), Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory by Wendell V. Harris. He also sites some voluminous reference guides such as The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism (775 double-column pages) edited by Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth, The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms edited by Irena R. Makaryk. The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, edited by Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (Hawthorn XIV).
In other words, such glossaries and dictionaries have been published from all major British and American publication houses that publish works of English literature and literary criticism, and even some prestigious university presses. Since the early 1990's the number has increased the most, explaining the latter rise in interest of literary theory.

I make much use of Hawthorn's preface to his glossary. I believe this to be a critical reading, a close analysis, and not really a theoretical rendition of a text (indeed the glossary). Whether a preface to a glossary or dictionary is considered a literary text or not is the subject of discussion at another platform, however, text, it is. Theory was always there, as Maurice Blonchett's use of the term "there is" may suggest. But literary theory has "arrived". Its arrival has caused problems for some who find it difficult to accommodate it into the discipline of literary scholarship. By others it has been hailed as a 'whiff of fresh air'.

Through this detailed citing of one of the writers of a glossary on literary theory, I have tried to point out some of the very obvious and major classifications and lexicographical challenges and contentions that is faced by the writer based on his own comments. Hawthorn's apologetic and diffidence is indicative of a moderate stand, a voice becoming much more audible of late. There is also a 'liberal' (pro-theory stand) and an anti-theory stand taken by literary 'conservatives' - if the juxtaposition of these two words are permissible! Such a conservative would refer to those who believe theory should take its position outside of the discipline, and that the discipline should remain the way it was - always about the literary text. Although such positions are a great deal less in number, it does not invalidate these claims at all. Raymond Picard, F. R. Leavis Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp, Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, are some of the critics who have mounted exemplary attacks upon literary theory over the past fifty years - the latter two of course, in quite an outrageous way.
For Hawthorn: "the best literary criticism is overtly informed by theory, just as the best theory feeds upon traditions of critical debate". He tries to harmonize the debate between criticism and theory asking to achieve "a creative tension" so that an engagement with literary works is informed by scholarship, critical acuity, and theoretical understanding" (Hawthorn VII). And thus enrich the discipline and our own engagement with it.

"Hi(gh) Theory"?

Terry Eagleton, a Marxist critic, in his book After Theory, cautions those who feel that "... 'theory' is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment. There can be no going back ..." (Eagleton 1). This is a voice much more forceful in relation to that of theory than that of Hawthorne's. Eagleton's underlying assumption is simply that theory has something worthy to add to literary studies. In fact in his enthusiasm Eagleton raises the claims of theory to a higher level of theorization by further stating that "we are living now in the aftermath of what one might call high theory" (Eagleton 2). Here the assumption is that we have just pulled ourselves out of being immersed in a pool of theory and the aftereffect is evident in the way it has left us drenched! Claims of a 'high theory' is quite popular among those who advocate the theoretical enterprise. However, this is a problematic coinage that assumes a linear rise and fall on a chart of theory. For example, the two questions that it immediately raises is that, whether 'high theory' refers to theory at its height of popularity, or whether it refers to theory at its philosophical best or most rigorous form: most ambitious, most ambiguous, most radical, most outrageous, most iconoclastic, most 'post'?.

If 'high theory' is considered to be accepted as theory at its most rigorous best, then it would not be referring to any recent phenomenon, as recorded history is dappled with moments of high theory. For instance, the entry point of all major ideologies such as Marxism, democracy, totalitarianism, the entry point of all religions and faiths, the initial stages of scientific discoveries made by Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin and so on, and even the various civilizing missions of the world, in other words, all
interventions in established systems which rose to dominating systems or overthrew established rules, or even interventions within these interventions are all acts of high theory. In fact it can be argued that these, and numerous other such examples were much more radical in their days and left a greater mark on present day life than any epistemological discovery that happened between the 60's and 90's - roughly the gestation to the adult period of literary theory.

Even if High Theory is referred to as a specific literary context, the philosophy of Lacan, Barthes, Derrida, Althusser, Gramsci, Lyotard, Foucault, Kristeva, Levi-Strauss, that gave rise to literary theory are being reworked and weaved and extended into various disciplines, they remain as the paradigm of theory and central to the discussions. Theories coming after, and based on the writings of these theorists such as post-colonialism, post-feminism, cyber-feminism and other identity politics, are outcomes or reactions to the earlier theorists. In other words the gestation of literary theory contained the most rigorous, radical and alternative ideas to begin with. In such a case, it would really not be a grave mistake to say, literary theory began as high theory. Such an argument would indicate a downward curve on a graph, where literary theory begins at a high point, with the writings of the theorists listed above, and gradually moves downward to a less radical and less metaphysical point, than what it began. This would contest the assumption that high theory came before theory reached a “high” point, in a logical reversal. In fact, Eagleton suggests this point that theorists whose works laid the foundation to literary theory as mentioned above, and their interrogation of fundamental metaphysical (philosophical) questions, have already been passed over with the rise of identity politics (Eagleton 2) and therefore high theory would constitute the “time” before identity politics enters into the literary discipline.

However, if high theory refers to a particular aspect of theory, namely: that which is anti-foundational; then the question arises why not call it anti-foundational, postmodern or post-structural. Why is there a need for a reference to ‘high-ness’? Also if high theory is an established position, then there has to be a low theory, or a moderate theory! Is structuralism, considered low theory? Or is structuralism part of
high theory? My assumption here to Eagleton's use of the phrase high theory is that it can only be spoken in a certain historical context, or a parameter or even a given spectrum, where there is a surge of activity. Whether this surge is a surge in the popularity in the reception or rejection of theory or a certain kind of extreme theory: radical or reactionary. And it is this surge that can be called high theory, if ever the term must be used. Or high in relation (relative) to its previous activity (its history) or content, namely: the introduction of the rebellious suffix "post", designating the "highness" in the high theory.

However, the post in post-structural and the postmodern, is very different than the post in postcolonial. The difference being the anti-foundational of the first two and the foundational, and essentialist identity of the latter (this will be explained more thoroughly in later chapters). In fact the question of identity becomes ephemeral in the post-structural, but of course even the most ephemeral and the most anti-foundational also constitutes an essential identity of its own.

If Eagleton's use of 'high theory' refers to the present interdisciplinary use of literary theory, a certain spread or a popularization of theory in certain echelons of the university, then we are really using the phrase 'high theory' not as a surge in an epistemological movement or more specifically a literary movement, but to indicate a kind of a popularization in the use of theory. In other words, in the history of literature, Literary theory becomes a movement (with subsets, of structuralism, post-structuralism post-modernism), and high theory becomes a surge or a high point in this movement called literary theory. Like a fire-cracker taking off in an epistemological space, and subsequently exploding in a flare of sparks – high theory.

If Eagleton's comment is to be taken at its face value these would be moments of high theory. If the latter is to be accepted, then the "aftermath of high theory" would have started in the early 80's by which time most of these founder philosophers of theory had passed away. In addition, their ideas were beginning to percolate into other disciplines, creating interventions in these various other disciplines as well as English literature. Of course the theoretical interventions into multiple disciplines that literary
theory has propagated has certainly become popular with it supporters and detractors equally. So much so that from the 1980's onward, a great deal of interest in theory is clearly marked by the number of printed work devoted to theory in general, along with the dissipation of theory into other disciplines. In other words, to see the 80's and the 90's as a period of high theory, would be based on the postulates of the dissipation of theory into other disciplines and a rise in the interest of theory and therefore its popularity.

Of course the word popularity becomes equally problematic due to its common meaning of being something which is necessarily favorable. Here a Brechtian definition of the word popular would serve my use. Brecht says:

Our concept of what is popular refers to a people who not only play a full part in historical development but actively usurp it, force its pace, determine its direction. We have a people in mind who make history, change the world and themselves. We have a mind fighting people and therefore an aggressive concept of what is popular. ... Popular means: intelligible to the broad masses... (Hawthorn 268 [Bloch et al.: 1977, 81]).

If the word people in the first sentence is replaced with human ideas, or concepts or theory in general, and the who in the second sentence is converted to a what; then what we are left with is that theory makes history and changes the world and the minds of people involved with the enterprise. Whether literary theory is intelligible by the broad masses or not, they are made to bare it. But if we restrict the word broad masses to academic institutes, then literary theory has become in simple words, quite popular, as its concern and contestation with it, acceptance or rejection of it, remaining in the spot-light of institutions.

Eagleton in his characteristic tongue in cheek manner explains:

Structuralism, Marxism, post-structuralism and the like are no longer the sexy topics they were. What is sexy instead is sex. On the wilder
shores of academia, an interest in French philosophy has given way to a fascination with French kissing. ... It is rather like writing (sic) your Master's thesis on the comparative flavor of malt whiskies, or on the phenomenology of lying in bed all day. It creates a seamless continuity between the intellect and everyday life (Eagleton 2-3).

It is this continuity that carries on a link between theory and popular culture. Which Eagleton refers to as the "historic gain of cultural theory" (Eagleton 4). His use of the term cultural theory is basically literary theory outside the realm of the "narrow" field of literary scholarship, the same 'narrowness' which may place film studies in a separate discipline in the name of academic convenience/specialization (which in this case seems a rational choice). In other words, theory does have a historical context to it and can be brought into the sphere of literary scholarship and treated as a literary intervention, which began a new era in literary studies. Therefore the study of literary theory, can begin as a study - "in itself it really is". The latter phrase suggesting criticism, a study of its history or biography, and thus inception and involvement in literary studies. Such a study would be a non-theoretical enterprise, it would however be the basis of a much larger debate which may find itself in the theoretical/non-theoretical (as both are theoretical) about the purpose of theory and the purpose of our discipline. Such a study will tell us about the avenues that theoretical interventions have made in the discipline of English studies, and the worthiness of such avenues and debates and whether or not literary theory can be seen as an era in our discipline. This may be seen as a very similar quest to what has earlier been done with, say the life and times of poets, a historical or a biographical studies, both central to literary scholarship.

The Radical 1960s

Literary movements such as neo-classicism, Romanticism, modernism, and even the renaissance, are all rooted in the history of the age and the prevailing social and intellectual trends such as Rationalism, Humanism, the French revolution, Social Darwinism, Freudianism, and so on. Although these labels are announced and agreed
upon by literary historians at a much later date, the writers, or thinkers are grouped together based on the dominant intellectual trends of their thought or paradigms that can be seen to run through their works. One simple reason for this commonality is that the writers of their respective eras would be reacting to or were naturally being subjected to similar historical events of their time, along with everyone else. (It maybe argued that these groupings are artificial constructions or rather impositions upon the writers, and therefore having no acceptability from the writers themselves. However, even if a writer’s reaction to a particular event is disparate in relation to that of his contemporaries, the sole commonality remains that they will still be affected by the same event and only be different in their reaction to it).

Therefore, an individual may give rise to an idea, but it is an age or an era that sanctions this idea or allows this idea to prevail (This “age or era” is constituted by a prevailing body of knowledge, ‘episteme’, in the Foucauldian sense or ‘paradigm’ as in the Kuhnian). Every era has its own guardians, gatekeepers, godfathers and kingpins, in the form of scholars and experts, politicians and theologians. It is an unwritten consensus, a certain ‘Man-demand’ acceptability that creates this era/discourse/working body of knowledge. Therefore it is never only the birth of an individual or his/her work, but the era, and the discourse (predominant prevailing body of knowledge of the times) that sanctions “new ideas”. “Sanction”, as the word suggest, is an approval or a restriction. Similarly, the era or the age either attacks the new ideas or welcomes it. Either way, the body of work, the individual and the idea is known, and at times even spread. But if it is ignored and relegated to the shelves of mediocrity or mystery, it can wait for centuries to be taken up by another age or maybe lost for eternity. In other words, the time and events had to be right for an idea to prevail. Scholars and individuals can always arrive with prophetic notions but they will evidently die out if the era does not accept it. This ‘rightness’ is constituted by historical events and even at times anomalies that prepare an age to receive a certain idea.

Post 1966 theory ushered in a new era in present day intellectual practices, which was unprecedented, ingenious and controversial. Although today nobody would be
outrageous enough to call it a movement in itself due to the disparities within the various formations of its practices, the variations *per se*, could be seen as a common aspect and read as part of a larger literary intervention, which might just fall short of being termed a literary movement by posterity.

The germination of literary theory of course is much before 1966 and will be dealt with shortly in chapter II. Nevertheless, literary theory should not be confused with the word ‘theory’ in general, or a theory of literature as introduced by Aristotle. For whatever is implied through the generic term theory, one aspect is very clear, and that is, theory has always been around. In fact the elaborations on tragedy and the *Poetics* was not literary theory but was a part of theory in general and studied as a branch of philosophy, and later incorporated to be studied as a part of criticism in English courses. This “general” theory which is referred to as theory alone, denotes a formula, postulate or a testable idea. Therefore, literary theory in this study should not be seen just as theory in the theory/practice dichotomy, but also as an intervention in literary studies.

Therefore, literary theory is marked by an epistemological interest in the structure of language, and with language in *toto* as a common “faculty of our species” (Eagleton). Its effect led to interdisciplinary pursuits beyond the scope of philosophy and literature. The development and historical context of literary theory can be traced back to Marxist intellectual discourse and the nationalist movements, and its effect in the USA. In fact the popularity of literary theory, its inclusion into departments of English literature, and the subsequent export/disposal (depending of ones perspective) of literary theory around the world comes with the hegemony of American academia. Therefore, the inception of literary theory in America and the historical process that put it into play in the American academic circles is crucial in understanding the overall project of theory in today’s department’s of English. And thus, the focal point of this movement of theory lay in North America.

America more radical in the 60’s, crammed with burning issues such as Communism, Left wing politics, Anti-abortionists, Black race movements and riots, Cold War,
Korean War, Vietnam War, the Domino Effect, the support of totalitarian regimes by successive American governments after World War II, (Zinn 567), an all powerful government, Nuclear power, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and a prevailing sense of insecurity, or uncertainty where everyone had conspiracy theories of their own. Thus volatile times paved a way for counter-culture. Literary theory can be seen to accommodate this trend (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter IV). During processions and marches on the streets – in the 1950’s, 60’s and partly 70’s, organic intellectual active/practice socialist and nationalist movements - a great deal of practice seemed to be coupled with theory. The American historian, Howard Zinn, writes that the 60’s was marked by a “surge of protest against race segregation and war (Vietnam) became an overwhelming national force” (Zinn 565). The strength of the American people and their activism is well documented by Zinn. However, in the 1980’s and 90’s the gung-ho conservative policies of Regan and Thatcher, a stable economy and rising power of the West brought power and confidence and a sense of over-all well being in the country’s economy and military might. This optimism had also trickled into academic institutions in the USA, leading to a greater flow of money in the universities, more international students more seminars and other academic activities and so on.

It is around at this time that theory is institutionalized. It enters the classroom. Theory becomes a form of counter-current, against the thrust of a conservatism being fueled by the cold war. The protests on the streets are comfortably contained in the classrooms, and discussed by, what is pejoratively termed, the armchair theorists much unlike the well-bred activist turned theorist of the 60’s, and its diminishing numbers in later years. Some how the universities have after the 1980’s became the only court yards for polemical debates.

The institutionalization of literary theory in the classroom as a part of the English curricula did not take theory away from the field but expanded its area. Bringing it within the comfortable and protected folds of the classroom (between the 1980’s and 1990’s) and thus leading to what some theorists call ‘high theory’, or the last great gust of theory before the wind leaves its proverbial sail!
Project and Definition: The Sermon

The institutionalization or the concern of theory and its application in contemporary English literature studies today is the outcome of a particular trajectory where many disparate forces are in play. Theory which arose in the 60’s after a gestation period starting from the 1900’s, to its institutionalization in the classrooms of some English departments in the US in the 70’s before spilling over into any other departments, and elsewhere in English departments around the globe, is a complex network of events that must be investigated. Within this trajectory, there is evidence of a rise of theory in English departments notably in the 80’s and 90’s and continues in a different variant well into the new millennium.

This same theories have now been applied to various other disciplines such as history (subaltern-studies), political-science, and other areas of study after being applied to literature. And in disciplines that have an affinity to literary studies such as film, theatre, and other mediums, its application overlaps with that of its application in literary studies. However, in literary studies, theory is most rigorous. And the polemics of theory in literature is contested most aggressively than in any other discipline. This may have to do with the fact that the limits of literature are much vast and inclusive of other disciplines, and makes other disciplines an integral part of it, and more so, with the advent of theory the boarders between disciplines have opened. In fact it was the Russian Formalists and later the New Critics who were uncomfortable with this vastness of the literary platform, so much so, that they limited their methodology to a rigorous textual analysis.

The question that may arise is whether psychological, or philosophical, or Marxist or feminist interpretations of literary texts would have been as rigorous and part of the discipline, if hypothetically speaking had literary theory never happened, or whether these perspectives heralded literary theory into the discipline of English literature. In other words, was literature always a mosaic of leftist, politics, emancipatory zeal,
psychology, philosophy and so on; and it was only a matter of time before it was recognized? The former areas of study were actually gaining historical momentum almost at the same time. For instance, before Freud no one would have called *Hamlet* a psychological thriller! Or a sympathetic interpretation of a portrayal of Shylock as a marginalized Jewish character at the receiving end of Christian discrimination and hegemony, first and foremost, which was clearly never the intension of Shakespeare, would never have appeared in any literary criticism of *The Merchant of Venice* prior to the theoretical interventions of a postcolonial deconstructive reading of the latter play. Which leads to one of my assumptions that theory has had its greatest impact in literary studies. Creating a new branch of inquiry in literary scholarship, culminating in a discursive intervention in the history of literary studies.

Earlier canonical studies of English literature talk of father’s, such as the father of the English language: Chaucer; Father of the English novel: Fielding; Father of Criticism: Johnson. English literature doesn’t really have a father of Romanticism, although some may feel there are many father’s and or no father at all, but patrons: Blake/Wordsworth and so on. But come Modernist times, and no one talks of fathers to begin with, as patriarchy is better identified only to be subsequently condemned. Our immediate legacy therefore disavows any need to search for a father of literary theory!

But given the vast influence of theory on literature, although its origin is most historical and based on works of philosophy; it is probably the first intervention in literature that doesn’t originate in the discipline, unlike most of the other literary movements. In fact postmodernism might not be seen as a literary movement of its own and maybe clubbed together with its influence starting with structuralism and continuing in the form of identity politics.
Project and Definition: Theory of Literature and Literary Theory

Whether we have a father of literary theory or patrons of literary theory it is important to ask what constitutes literary theory. The question tosses up many related postulates of theory and terms such as, the acts of theory, high theory, in theory, after theory, before theory, end of theory, cultural theory, social theory, and literary theory. A course in film studies will have literary theory. Popular culture, would incorporate literary theory, what does this mean?

Over the ages theory has been defined in many ways. The root word "theoria" refers to the functions of an envoy sent to participate in, for example, a religious ceremony or communal games. Since the envoy is an official representative of his home city his role has a political aspect. The theoros is both witness and participant, and his presence is also a mode of intervening in public affairs. Theory then, is not disinterested, disengaged contemplation of immutable truths; it is a form of involvement which alters the context in which it appears" (Davis 3). Others like "Jean-Michel Rabate describes theory not as the discourse of the Master, but as the discourse of the hysteric", which is "a quest for truth that always aims at pointing out the inadequacies of official, serious, and "masterful" knowledge'. Rather than imposing its own authority definitively, it is engaged in a quest for understanding which is interminable because it can never occupy a final, assured position" (Davis 4).

As mentioned earlier, theories have always been around in the form of any idea, conceptual premise, which is also a concluding remark or even a belief at the same time. In fact, it is always a belief, open for acceptance or rejection. That is how vast the expanse of theory maybe considered in its generic usage. The evolution of superstition can constitute a theory. Superstition itself can have a theory to it. According to the Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated, theory is a "mental view" or a "contemplation". It can be a formal set of ideas that is intended to explain why something happens or exists. It is also described as "an opinion or idea that somebody believes is true but that is not proved" as in the following example, I have this theory that most people prefer being at work to being at home" ("Theory" 2167).
Keeping the above definition of theory in mind, it is actually very difficult indeed to keep ideas from 'becoming' theories! In the context of English literature, Aristotle's theory on tragedy being the highest form of drama, more noble than comedy, or his discussion of hamartia and *Poetics*, concepts of Hubris, and the hero; can all certainly be considered a part of the theoretical, and more specifically can be said to formulate a theory of literature. This can also be said about *Biographia Literaria*, Keats' concept of objective correlative and even the function of criticism to a great degree as conceptualized by Arnold, Eliot and others. In fact, the once famous and often quoted debate between Rene Wellek and F. R. Leavis about the theoretical basis of practical criticism, and Wellek's continuous insistence upon Leavis to theorize his own assumptions upon which he based his own critical stances, despite Leavis' repetitive dodges, was Wellek's way of showing how criticism is also based upon a theory of its own (this will be discussed in Chapter III).

These all comprise of postulates, supported by observations and that in turn constitute a belief. In other words, they concur to a definition of theory found in a common dictionary. However, such theory is considerably different from the theory practiced in the mid 20th century in English departments under the then spurious category of literary theory in America, and in the 70 and 80's in other countries within the framework of English studies. The main distinction between the two is that these "earlier" theories of English literature were based either on Greco-Roman rationalist philosophy, myths and legends, Cartesian paradigms, Judeo-Christian ideology, or universal secular humanism — the marked spirit of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and numerous other concepts and traditions, at the core of which lay the paradigm of viewing literature as an artistic representation of the human condition, through the medium of language. This is very different from what literary theory today has known to become.

In other words with the formation of literary studies as a discipline, it is possible to peer back and narrate the theoretical basis that both brought it forth or "made" it into a discipline, and also, to explain the working assumptions of the discipline itself.
Therefore, it is widely accepted that theory was always prevalent, even when the concern of the discipline was either history, biography or criticism. Theory in literary studies became much more intensive and a rigorous concern in the latter half of the 20th Century. The reason being that 20th Century literary theory is very different from any theory practiced earlier, as the latter theoretical enterprise is based on an alternative paradigm that came as a result of a new understanding of language.

English literary theory as practiced since the 60's is clearly based on the advances made in the area of language studies in the early 1900's, and draws its impetus from this legacy of understanding language as an arbitrary system of signs. The reading of language as an arbitrary system of signs, and subjecting this view, on poetry and literary prose, or literary language in general, leads to a striking contestation of the firmly held notion of literature as being a form of representation (this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter).

This look into language, “in itself it really is”, rather than the Hellenic ideals that language contains, or that its is seen only as a carrier of ideas or various other Greco-Roman philosophy, upon which the historical basis of the discipline of English literature is traditionally said to be based; becomes the primary marker which separates any theory of English literature from literary theory practiced in the post-1960's Anglo-American English departments.

Although this change can be thought to take place at the epistemological level given the paradigmatic shift that occurs in literary studies with the advancements of linguistics. At another level, more visceral forces such as: historical and sociopolitical, psychological and even geographical 'forces', must also be taken into account, due to their influence on the formation of discourse and the creation of a discipline. In other words, throughout this study I will try to show how in the “life and times of theory” in the discipline of English literature, the epistemological influences and advancements are as responsible in formulating English studies (of which literary theory has become a part of) as are history and geography, aspects which are continually kept aside.
Before I can present the "Life and times of theory", I believe it is important to first present a narrative in retrospect of English studies and then try to establish the juncture at which literary theory enters the scene. A very brief explanation of this historical basis of English studies will also assist in understanding the difference between the pre-1960s theory of literature and the post 1960's literary theory that I am trying to distinguish. It will also illustrate how a language based literary theory as part of literary scholarship has been brought into our discipline. However, before either of these questions can be answered it is important to illustrate how and why English literature was considered worthy to be studied in the first place, and later, whether theory is an addition to this worth. By answering these questions it will also be possible to see how literary theory fits itself into the realm of literary studies. In other words what may seem to be a lengthy digression or only tangential to my field of study, it will illustrate the fissures and crevices of English literature that theory interrogates and attaches to itself. This will also be important for chapter two where I discuss the detractors of theory or the anti-theory theorists, where these areas of "attachments" become the platform for contestation and debates between pro-theory and anti-theory groups of academics. But here my intention is to show the historical influences in the formation of literary studies and how literary theory which is a part of literary studies today, is ushered into to folds of the discipline.

A Short History of English Literary Studies

The formation of English literature into a discipline is an area that has been well documented by many scholars and more so in recent times, given the mounting interest of English pedagogy. The fact that literature can be seen as worthy enough to study as a discipline, however easily we may accept this today, was not so simple a decision, and was the result of decisions and responses taken over many years, and actively driven by a political consciousness in very recent times (Felperin 23, Viswanathan 2).
For example, the fact that the same Hebraic rigors of scholarship that was dedicated to theology, biblical studies, and by extension to Latin and Greek language studies, “became a model for vernacular literature”, would most probably have begun with the division of the state and the church (Felperin 23). Although this is a completely different area of research one can only postulate that there may have been a need for a secular scholarship, that caters to the secular state, as an alternative to the theological rigors that catered to the church. From the time of the secular divide in England, the development of English poetry and drama, from the miracle to the morality plays to a Chaucerian age and a subsequent flourishing in the Renaissance, driven by a Hellenic pursuit of beauty in the Elizabethan age and later, are all part of the accepted history of English literature (see Leguiourous and Cazamian, David Daiches). The choice to study literature, or that it can be placed under the rigors of scholarship, originally associated to the church, would most definitely have been a radical concept at the time. But it is also a recognition that “value, tradition, and authority” preached through a literary curriculum can be taught through an assortment of secular texts (Viswanathan 7). However, this secular curriculum was taught as part of the upper class school curriculum in Britain during colonial times and having a religious curriculum in English parish and charity schools for children from the working class (Viswanathan 7). Thus there was a vast contradictory indecisiveness between the religious and the secular, in the formulation and study of English literature. This indecisiveness is transferred onto the colonies, which become a testing ground for English literary studies.

In England, with the increasing power of the colonial state, from the late 1700’s there would follow a rise in confidence in the state machinery, which in turn would trickle down to a confidence in the history, culture, and of course the art and literature produced by the people of the secular state. This is evident in the rising stature and prestige commanded by its men of letters during the 1700’s when, for example poets like Dryden and Pope were no longer just popular entertainers but also revered men-of-letters, art and culture.
The superimposing of the Hebraic rigor of scholarship upon the Hellenic artistic pursuit; a quaisi Arnoldian synthesis of the Hebraic and the Hellenic, the popular antinomy is actually the symbolic basis of English studies. To see things as they really are, juxtaposed to conduct and obedience (Arnold 131). Literature therefore becomes a secular rigor, far removed from the theological and classical philology, but worthy to enter the secular English classrooms. This is roughly the very main historical trend that brought English studies to the fore. Although this may seem an extremely patchy account, a more detailed account would befit the topic of another dissertation. However, it is all that is required for this study at the moment in order to establish a premise which I intend to conclude very soon.

As mentioned earlier, English drama and poetry was heavily influenced by Christian morality and faith (Miracle and Morality plays). However, it is said to have undergone a rebirth with its association to an Hellenic influence. The renaissance was no doubt a radical influence on art and culture in Europe (as much as say World War I and II was in written modern history) but the emphasis that is placed by poet laureates of the 1800s, upon the influence of the renaissance, especially during the formation of English studies, is so great that it could be seen as part of a conscious political choice and as a part of the advocacy of the secular agenda of English. This is a point that has forever remained understated within English literary discipline.

This politically conscientious tracing of the root of English literature back to the Hellenic tradition, which is concerned with myths, legends, platonic philosophy, spontaneity, beauty and the pastoral, is a subsequent undermining of the Judeo-Christian influence which concerns itself with justice and truth, divine love and forgiveness. Thus, the two dominant paradigms of English studies can be more or less compartmentalized within the framework of the Hellenic and the Hebraic and the subsequent tussle between the two. This obviously was of concern to the God fearing Matthew Arnold who believed in the harmonizing unity of these antinomies: “Both Hellenism and Hebraism arise out of the wants of human nature, and address themselves to satisfying those wants. But their methods are so different...” (Arnold 134). The well known Arnoldian stand is to believe that elements of both, surface in
the literature produced in England at any time. However, when it came to the formation of the discipline, the Hellenic was privileged over the Hebraic tradition as the historical root of English literature, not because literature would no longer contain any divine love or sense of truth and justice but it is also made to merge not only into the cultural history of the protestant community but also the secular state, and later the nation-state. Arnold was to set sail against the dominance of the romantic current spearheaded by Coleridge and Wordsworth, who believed that the natural spontaneity, imagination, beauty, or the finer human qualities were embedded in the Hellenic.

However, the dominance of this current was so strong that Arnold had to carefully weave his Hebraic ideals around it. He does so by rejecting the Jewish originary Hebraic ideals for the "more spiritual, the more attractive development of Hebraism" as the 'advent' of Christianity and Christian thought (Arnold 136). It is this particular quality of Hebraism along with Hellenism that "will no longer be dissociated and rival, but will be a joint force of right thinking and strong doing to carry [one] towards perfection" (Arnold 207). Thus here, (the anti-Semitism apart), in Arnold, there is an obvious affinity and veneration toward Christian morality but also a striking need to remain gentlemanly secular. This theorization of the Hellenic and the Hebraic or a specialized interest that was taken up in the area of literature and its association to the secular is most evident during the romantic period, and at the same time made the study of English literature, a worthwhile discipline.

Therefore, if F. R. Leavis would have tried to return Rene Wellek's charge to explain his own critical stance or the platform from which he operated or the basis of his theory of literary criticism; Leavis' answer would be, that his own theoretical basis of criticism is English national history, Aristotelian philosophy, Greek myths and oral traditions and a secular humanist, non-Judaic but Christian, nationalist platform. This pursuit of a secular scholarship, as an alternative to a Jewish/Hebraic/theological scholarship and the subsequent privileging of the Hellenic and re-drawing the root of English literature tracing it back to the Hellenic tradition and therefore making it truly secular, may have been one of the greatest impetus to the formation of English studies till the mid 1800s. The greatest impetus, which led to the spread of English studies, is
of course, colonialism. And again literary studies will be fueled by a political consciousness, but unlike the age long tussle between the secular and the religious agenda, and the secular powering the state and overriding the church – by the 1800’s, the state is brimful and exuding confidence and thus literary studies takes up a far more greater, unprecedented nationalistic and colonial agenda.

Gauri Viswanathan in her seminal work *Masks of Conquests* documents the formulation of English as a discipline under the aegis of colonial rule, where literature becomes a mask for colonial ideology and its subsequent coercion. Although the study of English language predates the study of English literature in the colonies and at times were taught together, the study of language is shown to be a utility based prerequisite for literary study, which becomes a further prerequisite for domination and discipline. Literature naturally becomes the instrument of rule through the values that are assigned to it, namely “the proper development of character or the shaping of critical thought or the formation of aesthetic judgment” (Viswanathan 4). In fact she identifies the underlying assumption of English literary studies under colonial rule to be to educate those who are “morally and intellectually deficient” into becoming obedient and industrious subjects to the crown. Of course the success of colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, the superiority complex of the colonizer and the efficiency with which they took over, and the voiceless cries of disgruntled obedience, grudgingly accepting control, is a history of an ailing rule and a society stratified through caste, class, religion, and various other ideologies and has always been characteristic of this subcontinent.

Here the legacy of the religious and the secular divide in the formulation of English studies is brought over from the British Isles and both religious and non-religious groups make the Indian subcontinent a testing ground to find out which curriculum makes the best colonial subjects. The ‘best subject’ of course being a term relative to the various groups’ agenda. For example, from the perspective of the East India Company, the best subject would translate to the obedient producers of company profit and consumers of English products or for the missionaries: the curriculum which would produce more Christian subjects would be a worthy curriculum. Similarly, once the British Raj was established, a curriculum was sought that would
produce subjects loyal to the crown. Other groups may have wanted a more “comprehensive” curriculum that would produce English, Christian, and British subjects and so on and so forth – all in one, or one that could turn the skin white (metaphorically speaking).

Gauri Viswanathan gives a detailed account of problems that missionaries such as Alexander Duff, and others faced while introducing a religious curriculum, and the governor-generals, educationist, and statements, and the debates about how much religion ought to be preached in schools in the face of native resistance or, how religious teaching could be camouflaged through non-religious texts with religious overtones such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The account gives an impression of a tussle for, not the soul of the native but, the “subjectivization” of the Indian in a manner that recalls the old miracle and morality plays. In fact the initial education policies of the British rule commissioned by the Charter Act of 1813 while encouraging a colonial responsibility for education, discouraged a religious education to avoid any confrontation with native religion, and thus in tune with the secular (historical) ethos of literary studies. However by the 1820s the “atmosphere of secularism in which English studies were conducted became a major cause for concern to the growing numbers of missionaries ...” (Viswanathan 46). They gradually exerted pressure on the British parliament to allow religious and moral instructions, the compromise of course between the two sides resulted in English literary studies, as will be shortly described. The 1835 English Education Act was instrumental in finally institutionalizing the study of English literature specifically, and not just English language or other Oriental studies, which had always been existent (Viswanathan 46). In fact instructions for other studies also began to be conducted in English after this time, and institutions exclusively meant for the study of English were being set up.

But the most potent question that Viswanathan asks in my view and for my purposes here in this study is, why was literature chosen as an instrument of social control, or discipline and management over direct military force or even other subjects like history, the sciences and so on. She says,
... it is important to determine whether British educational measures were elaborated from an uncontested position of superiority and strength and as such are to be read as unalloyed expressions of ethnocentric sentiment or whether that position itself was a fragile one that it was the role of educational decisions to fortify, given the challenge posed by historical contingency and confrontation.

The argument of this book [Masks of Conquest] leans toward the second proposition, specifically, that the introduction of English represented an embattled response to historical and political pressures: to tensions between the East India Company and the English Parliament, between Parliament and missionaries, between the East India Company and the Indian elite classes. The vulnerability of the British, the sense of beleaguerment and paranoid dread, is reflected in defensive mechanisms of control that were devised in anticipation of what British administrators considered almost certain rebellion by natives against actions and decisions taken by the British themselves (Viswanathan 10).

She therefore identifies the ruptures in the colonial administrative identity: between a position of military superiority and a vulnerable position constituted by a constant threat of rebellion. She feels that education and specifically English literary education was born out of this "unstable foundation of knowledge" (Viswanathan 11). It worked as a buffer or a defensive mechanism to this instability. Her argument in the book illustrates how education and more specifically English literature was used as a tool to strengthen a belief in not just English superiority but in the virtue of English rule. But then again, why wasn't the exhibition of British industrial or military advancements or simply colonial dominance thought to be enough to exhibit colonial superiority? Why was education a requirement? And why not European scientific education? Was it the belief that the primitive Indian was not interested in any of these purists, and was attracted only to the culture and civilization of the English. Was the science education thought to be too time consuming and require more
elaborate resources, and a mounting cost! This may be the case, but still, why literature and not, say, the history of the kings and queens of England. English literature was probably the only subject that the Indians didn't have, and it worked quite like the opium for the Chinese. Their recognition of the fact that a natural human affinity to be relatively more open and accommodative to the 'harmless' arts, less rigorous but more local than the sciences.

Viswanathan's work is fascinating in its dissection of Orientalism working through education and further rearranging perceptions about English knowledge, at the microscopic level. She refuses to accept the views presented by David Kopf and Bruce McCully, who both felt that the education that was given to the colonial subjects was used to question colonial authority and to eventually subvert it: and "thus studying Indian nationalism as a by-product of English education" (Viswanathan 16). This is tantamount to holding a belief that the education that was given to the Indians was liberal and liberating, and was provided in good faith by the British administration and taught faithfully by educators. Viswanathan identifies these very assumptions as part of the colonialist bias that had been contained in the very "selection of content understood to be based on well-established canonical principles transcending the immediate realities of time, place, and circumstance. Presumably, the principles of curricular selection are drawn from the principles by which literary knowledge itself is organized – for example, according to genres, periods, and movements. No discrimination is apparently made here between the curriculum and its content; an education in literature is unreservedly identified with the program of perception, thought, and action that is culture" (Viswanathan 18). This legacy is not only a part of the colonial enterprise, but is part of the English identity born out of a secular divide of church and state which I have elaborated earlier, and which continued to be debated for long. Therefore, the belief that a liberal education is both humanistic and liberating, had became a part of occidental consciousness, of a certain ideal, humanizing English Man, and seen as the producer of an ideal English literature. As Viswanathan says "The affirmation of an ideal self and an ideal political state through specific national literature – English literature – is in essence an affirmation of English identity". It is therefore this identity, which is ferried over to
the colonies, and could only be camouflaged through English literature in its "secular formulations" (Viswanathan 20). This could not have been achieved through a teaching of the history of England or English scientific advancements, or even through religious teaching in the face of a native resistance or a colonial paranoia toward a native uprising.

Viswanathan rightfully marks the Charter Act in 1813 as the beginning of English education and therefore also English studies. The two main issues of the charter was the colonizers assumption of responsibility for native education and the relaxation of missionary activity in India (23). It was quickly realized that in order to rule the vast planes of India the British had to seek the assistance of the Indian rulers and existing power structures of the natives. It was also understood that "no political tradition could be created anew or superimposed on another without a violent rejection of it by the preexisting society" (Viswanathan 33). Therefore, the need for cultural synthesis at some ephemeral level became imminent which lead to the adoption of the Filtration Theory: or a belief that "cultural values percolate downward form a position of power and by enlisting the cooperation of intermediate classes representing the native elite" (Viswanathan 34). The administrative support of education was first directed to indigenous scholarship, namely Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. However, with the mounting pressure of the missionaries in Britain to spread religion to the "pagan" Indian and the reluctance of the government for any religious education that may destabilized the rule of the colonies was settled through the introduction of English literature. English literature becomes a part of the proselytizing mission – a teaching of religion through non-religious texts in order to make teaching less offensive to native culture and religion. Naturally, literary texts which had religious overtones initially became part of the canon.

Much later in the late 1800's when there was an effort of rid literature of its religious associations, some argued with the latent support of the British government that "literature was supported in its morality by a body of evidence that also upheld the Christian faith". Therefore, literature was deemed to be the "perfect synthesis of
these two opposing positions, inclining the reader’s thoughts toward religion while maintaining its secular character” (Viswanathan 87).

In the beginning of its inception, English education would not command the same respect as say a knowledge in the ancient languages like Arabic, Persian or Sanskrit. Gradually the funds provided for the study of oriental languages was curtailed in favor of the promotion of English language and literature (Viswanathan 101). Along with this, the lucrative opportunities and privileges provided by government jobs and involvement of the natives in the British Raj, the English language gained importance as a prerequisite for employment. Along with this, the reduction of economic support that the ancient languages of the native’s received from the British rulers led to its complete severing from posterity, based on economic opportunities. Viswanathan, also gives detailed accounts of how class and cast hierarchy as well as the religious divide worked in its own way to make English appeal to the natives in many ways. (Although this again may seem to be an area outside the framework of this study, this argument will be brought up again, in Chapter III, where a similar situation appears in the reception of literary theory. In other words situations that popularized English literature in the mid 1800’s in the Indian subcontinent, almost foreshadows the situation of literary theory in the mid 20th century in the most eerie parallel that can be seen).

The experimentation with an English literary curriculum by Alexander Duff is documented in great detail. Viswanathan shows, how Duff curved his curriculum with great agility and quite unlike other missionaries. For example, it was common among the missionaries to believe that a secular education in English would heighten the native’s intellect but provide no moral principles to contain this intellect and therefore drive the native towards evil (Viswanathan 75). In a similar light, Duff attributed the Mutiny of 1857, to the secular policies of the government (Viswanathan 52). However unlike most missionary groups, he did not feel that imaginative literature and poetry had a corrupting influence on the native subjects, and therefore would not give rise to tormented rebellious morals and ideals. In fact, in his curriculum, he left out Johnson, Addison and Pope even with their overt claims to
Christianity. Since Duff believed the power of the Bible lay in its imagery. He felt that to train a native in the language of imagery or literary language in the traditional sense would prepare him/her to be able to become a far more appreciative reader of the Bible and be moved by its imagery. His curriculum was thus designed to appeal to the reader's sense of emotion, rather than to a sense of logic and reason. In other words, he wanted to prepare the native until the Bible could be allowed to best perform its miracle (Viswanathan 55). "In Duff's view it was not theoretically impossible for literature to be a source of religious skepticism in one situation and a source of religious belief in another. If it were true that morality lay in texts, then selected texts could readily be singled out as more "moral" than others. Instead, Duff believed that morality lay in intention, context, purpose, and the overall structure of the educational system" (Viswanathan 57).

This was, if not anything else, an ingeniously clever stroke of faith, virtue, sense of superiority and patronization, to say the least, all coupled together in an unwavering determination to win the soul of the natives. It also goes to show that the study of literature is probably more political than the study of politics itself. In fact, art and especially literature is probably the greatest political activity that the world has ever faced, and yet the most underrated of all political activities or widely accepted to be apolitical, which in turn makes it all the more potent. The politics of literature may be drawing its potency from this very garb of being apolitical.

Therefore according to Viswanathan:

The introduction of English literature marks the effacement of a sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance. The English literary text, functioning as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state, becomes a mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer that one unusually self-conscious British colonial official, Charles Trevelyan, was prompted to remark "[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps
higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind (Viswanathan 20).

Literature therefore is ideological, tacit and tactful and can serve the power that employs it, as well as threaten it at the same time. Through its dynamic process, the discipline itself gains a certain life of its own, (hence my title “the life and times” of theory; but more about this later) imbibing a certain character, independent of its prescription as well as its reception. Thus, the discipline gains a certain identity and projects a certain identity upon those who associate themselves with it. The slippery nature of the text formulated by Author/author, and the even more devious selection of the text in the constructing of the canon, the belief in the power of the imagery of the text – the Bible or Paradise Lost – gives the text, perspective, character, and an identity of its own. This identity of course is in no way a unitary constant but a temporal/historical gradient of ambiguity, as Bhabha would suggest (Viswanathan 96). In other words, a particular human identity is formulated by literature, at a particular moment in history, which contains a particular fingerprint of the particular historical moment along with the power structure. In the case of the formulation of English literature, the moment can consist of the missionary zeal, the secularized humanist notion of morality peppered by Christian ethics, or even company profit.

According to Viswanathan, “The inaugural lecture of A. J. Scott at University College, London, in 1848 is said to be the earliest instance of a formal academic plea for the study of literature as an expression of the culture of an age and as a reflection of society. By 1852 the historical study of English literature was firmly established in University College. In 1875 the alliance between literature and history was given institutional expression with the merging of the chair of English literature with that of history. Never very stable or clear on the point of the relationship between language and literature, English as a discipline became even more blurred and confused when a separate chair was created for English language in the same year” (Viswanathan 117).

It is therefore clear that the study of literature has never been a dispatch of a complete idea, as it would have relatively been for the study of language, or even for the
The study was more contrived or arrived at, or rather its utility and a possible system of control was realized and then used. She continues: “The transition for the rhetorical tradition of belles lettres to the historical study of literature is explained as a displacement of Renaissance conceptions of language that “removed attention from the situation of utterance and located all significance in the logic of language, which was determined by nonlinguistic consideration.” With the passing of the old rhetorical traditions, the study of literary genres gradually became oriented in literary history. Present-oriented and context-bound, the formal method of disputation gave way to the authority of preexisting structures of mind and society as the prime catalyst of knowledge. The choice was against a kind of intellectual inquiry directed toward the present in favor of one based on the authority of established usage, historical precedent, and social convention. The object of literary training is understood as twofold: first, to develop a historical awareness of the cultural moments in which those usages, precedents, and conventions are especially strong and second, to reclaim those moments as exemplary instances of truth, coherence, and value” (Viswanathan 118-119).

But this should not be read as a continuous narrative about the evolution of literature. Neither is it Viswanathan’s objective to present an evolutionary track of literature (Viswanathan 168). However, it delineates the play of power and human involvement from the position of power and the historical decision making process that brings a discipline into the fore, influences it and gives it a final shape.

Therefore, human agency is embodied in the construction and the study of literature, the moment the reader comes in contact with the text in both its reading and its teaching. From the violent hostile reactions against Christian religious education and even English education in general, to the enforcement of these types of education by the ruling power become the conflicting acts of literature. It is within these acts that agency is bound. Therefore, the teaching of the Bible, or the choice to not teach the Bible are both quite revolutionary acts of literature; a legacy which continues till today in our discipline. The history of culture and the constitution, the formation of the nation state, the destruction of the Nation state have all been accomplished
through literature. Wars maybe fought through armies of men but an Empire survives or rules through the arts and culture and yes literature is part of this rule as well. Britain probably could rule one third of the world as effectively as it did, most probably due to the hegemony of English language and literature. The imagined community as Benedict Anderson theorizes, is kept together not only by what he calls a print capital, but also through a constructed narrative history, no true than a fable or a myth, but brought into the realm of justified-true-belief, to use a Popperian expression. Similarly the human need for justice or the will to justice becomes a constant rarified pledge of art and literature.

But what does all this have to do with literary theory? By giving a detailed account of the formation of English literary studies and some of the possible dominant influences that developed it into the discipline as we know it today it is, now with some level of clarity, possible to claim that theory in English literature, which is claimed to have always existed in which ever form it may, prior to the mid 1960's, its paradigm was dominated by the secular, platonic, and Hellenic and later an adoptive Hebraic tradition, and made to be driven by a nationalistic and at times a religious agenda. There was a direct involvement of men of religious intent, men of commerce and men of the government. Needless to add the patriarchy of colonial rule, all tugging at the living carcass of the colonized country toward their own ideals of discipline and rule.

In other words, English literary studies was the result of socio-religious, economic and of course political decisions, taken over hundreds of years. Any decision is a result, often ridden with coercive tactics, human ego, ignorance and accidents, made at times under the guise of a noble desire of the upliftment of Humankind. It is this overall historical process – that has brought English literature into the fold of a discipline. Similarly, it is through a historical process, much more than advances in philosophical and rationalist thought as many would suggest, that literary theory has become a part of literary studies. Although the apparatus that have brought English studies in the forefront may not be the same that produce theory or brought it into the folds of literary scholarship, the powers and influence that have affected English studies in general have certainly had their influence on literary theory as well. In fact,
after the 1960's, the nationalistic agenda embedded in English literature is contested and interrogated along with the universal secular humanistic stand that had been hailed for centuries. The concept of truth being constructed through language – an arbitrary system of signs, is also understood to be fueled by hegemonic power structures, and gradually theory undergoes a paradigmatic shift toward a deeper search into (gender, sexuality race, ethnicity, religion) identity, human agency and the will to justice.

I would like to reiterate that the distinction between the practices of theory in departmental institutions of English before the mid 1960's and after, is that, before the 1960's the theory of English literature was dominated by the secular, platonic, and Hellenic traditions, and made to be driven by a nationalistic agenda. While a post 1960's practice of literary theory, clearly shows a paradigmatic emphasis on language, and the understanding of language as a system of signs (this will be the topic of the second chapter). In the last sixty years, the identification and the importance given to the arbitrary nature of language is taken as an episteme or a new paradigm in the definition of language. This is to be seen as an alternative study of language, as opposed to a study of language and languages that has dominated language scholarship over the past thousand years or so. As strikingly hyperbolic as this may sound, there is evidence that language has been studied in its syntactical, or grammatical formulation as well as its historical evolution for centuries.

From here onwards, although I will substitute the word theory with the more specialized phrase, 'literary theory', in order to limit the breadth and scope of my thesis to the theories that went on to influence literary studies. These same theories have specific and specialized usage in say for example, film studies, but such usage would remain outside of my scope and objective. Similarly, feminist theory or other social theories like Marxist theory and psychoanalytic theory and others which also have applications in the fine arts, film, history, sociology and so on, but again I will only concentrate on its application in literature. I am aware that this may be a contradiction to the interdisciplinary nature of theory itself, but I wish to operate from a platform of literature, and am more interested in understanding how theory has
affected the discipline of literature. To investigate the influence of theory in other areas is beyond my scope, not to mention my academic ability to pass scholarly comment upon the influences of theory in disciplines such as economics, sociology, film and the fine arts.

Therefore, the theory that can be ascribed to literature and that which forms a significant intervention in literary practices and scholarship in general, I will refer to as 'literary theory'. For instance, Marxist theory, and psychoanalytical theory, feminist theory have all made great headways in literary scholarship but something like game theory, or chaos theory, has not been shown to have any direct relevance to literature per se, or at least not yet. It is for this reason that I prefer to use the term literary theory as a convenient restriction of the scope of my area. This range includes the application of theory in literature which 'awakened' in the 60's (after a considerable gestation period 1900's and even in the 1920's when a great deal of theoretical readings of text were already being done by scholars of continental schools), to its institutionalization in the classrooms of English departments in the US in the 70's and elsewhere around the globe in notably in the 80's and 90's and the new millennium.

It is therefore, that I consciously avoid the use of the singular term theory or even cultural theory (as used by Eagleton and others), as this term for me encompasses a much wider range of applications of these same theories across disciplinary boundaries. In other words, the concern of literary theory would be theory's relation to literature, and cultural theory would be using the same theories as they apply to literature and other disciplines as well.

**But Wherefore a “Life and Times” of Theory?**

Academic disciplines have their periods of infancy, adolescence, maturity – and perhaps also senility and death. New or young disciplines are characteristically very conscious of the need to
establish and preserve a distinct identity; like newly independent nations they patrol their own borders vigilantly, eager to ensure that powerful neighbors do not violate their territorial integrity (Hawthorne V).

Why talk about the "life and times" of the poets; such as the life of Milton or the life of Shakespeare, and why not a "life" of theory — a preposterous travesty — if what it means to be Milton or Shakespeare is nothing but a conceptual structure, the essence of which, can be bombarded and collapsed, through a post structural reading. We can take theory to be a character in a narrative that we call English studies. We can talk about the life of theory. The characterization or rather the personification of theory can consist of quite a few things. It can be quite ferocious and therefore animal. It can take birth in places like the Maghreb or Prague. It is mobile and thus moves or migrates from east to west and then from western locations to the east. Theory grows and self perpetuates, it gives rise to other theories. It may not breath, but neither do amoeba’s which are comfortably placed in the animal kingdom. In other words, theory, theoretically seems more "living" than a virus! It bites, feeds, and chews, like maggot infestations, upon the brains of some students. It certainly becomes old and even senile. The "life and times" of theory implies a certain death, but no one is really sure whether or not it really dies. It reincarnates itself through a dialectical process. In other words, a title that resonates a bildungsroman, or a biography of literary theory is more relevant than an apology/defense of theory or a suicidal attack.

Genealogy

In his path-breaking book, Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction, Robert J.C. Young provides a comprehensive and detailed study of the historical roots of postcolonialism. I depend a great deal upon this work for its detailed historical references. But this is not to say that a history of literary theory is the history of postcolonialism. But that a great deal of 20th century thought has been steered through a dialectics between colonialism and nationalism on the one hand and capitalism and Marxism on the other. This is the historical setting of much of our
contemporary global intellectual legacy. Although some may align colonialism with capitalism and nationalism with Marxism, this would be an oversight of the fact that Marxism can also be quite colonial and nationalism can be quite capitalist in mode and conduct. For my convenience, the initial demarcation would be used in this work. The intellectual resources provided by these two dominant trends have been tapped by not only postcolonialism in specific, as J.C. Young’s study suggests, but literary theory in general as I will show. Or even the practice of theory in literature in general.

I do not wish to state that these have exclusively dominated 20th century intellectual trends over others, either. For example, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, and the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, may have had their own points of origination, which maybe argued to be exclusive of the two dominant trends that I have mentioned. However, these seminal works have had their own political articulation and dissemination and propagation by these dominant trends, and through which they have become identified in our recent past and also present discourse. The following is a brief outline of the dominant intellectual setting of our contemporary global legacy.

**Colonialism**

Colonialism symbolically began in 1492 (Young 4). The history of colonialism is a history of repression and dislocation. Of course dislocation in itself is a form of repression but in the colonial context I use it as a blanket term to refer to Slavery, the movement of labour and relocation of communities. Nevertheless, both are acts of violence. Repression, a violence on the physical and contemporary whereas dislocation becomes a violence upon the mind, the memory, a loss of the familiar, leaving one stripped of ability and in an unfamiliar and fearful state. With lost familiarity comes a confusion in identity what so ever, and an inability to act. In other words, it can lead to a lack of agency.
Although history books are filled with episodes of colonialism and conquest, some scholars agree upon the idea that colonialism after 1492 has taken a somewhat different root than any previously recorded notion of colonialism. Young quotes Gellner remarking that "the recent domination of the world by the west can be seen ... as primarily an aspect of the transformation of the world by a new technology, economy, and science which happens, owing to the uneven nature of its diffusion, to engender a temporary and unstable imbalance of power" (Young 5 [Gellner 1993:3]). Young adds that along with this technological advantage and power, colonialism brought forth cultural superiority.

However, cultural superiority and moral justification is in some form an ingrained notion in all conquests and subsequent domination. Ancient empires, Crusades and even the Mongol invasions, which may have vindicated themselves through their mass assimilation, were far from 'assimilators' to begin with. However, unlike Gellner, Young is not willing to brush colonialism under the carpet of modernization (Young 5). Young's own interpretation of colonialism is as follows:

... its history was extraordinary in its global dimension, not only in relation to the comprehensiveness of colonization by the time of the high imperial period in the late nineteenth century, but also because the effect of the globalization of western imperial power was to fuse many societies with different historical traditions into a history which, apart for the period of centrally controlled command economies, obliged them to follow the same general economic path. (Young 5).

Unlike other conquests, in history, as the empire expanded, the center always become weaker, and at times even redundant. In the most morally obligatory struggle of mankind that has been recorded in history, the Crusades, the religious centre of the Holy Roman Empire was in Rome, where as, its power centers lied elsewhere, in England, Spain, France along with the unifying iconic centre, Jerusalem. Even in the beginning of the Islamic Empire, the centre shifted many times, starting with Mecca, to Syria, Iraq, Egypt, to Istanbul until the time of the Ottomans where the centre actually become redundant, for instance, the Safavids in Persia and the Mughuls in the
Indian sub-continent, are known to have used the Ottoman seal to sanction their rulers as a sign of solidarity to Islam rather than the Ottomans. The Safavids were of course known for being even less enthusiastic about such sanctions from the Ottoman Caliphate. It is most probably with these shifting centres that assimilation and adaptability is signaled. Here the primary concern was religious glory and regional supremacy.

With Western colonialism, the primary objectives were trade, economic exploitation and settlement of a surplus population (Young 24). National glory and other cultural values were a “by-product” (Young 24). This was possible because the centre was held firmly, it never was shifted nor was it compromised; in fact, it was never even under threat. The West was never a part of its colonies unlike earlier colonial rule, it rather steered its colonies away from the comforts of its centre. A prima facie exception to this rule maybe Algeria and its colonial master France, however, the Franco-Maghrebian divide (which I touch upon in the last chapter) in the sociopolitical realm is still very evident, and one of the reasons why Algerian liberation became so bloody.

There was no mass exchange of culture within the colonizing nations and their colonies, (except for maybe the white colonies and that too at a much later stage) but rather the reverse was clearly engineered, as colonial culture and tradition was disseminated into the colonies in a one-way traffic. This is why the superiority of culture, which is common in all conquests is given much time to turn into a superiority of every possible cultural product, including language, literature, history, etiquette, art, architecture, systems of trade and economics and the advancement of Christian high morality and so on. Along with this came the fusing of disparate identities, a result of ignorance on the part of the colonial powers due to the distance in geography and superiority and a disregard for anything indigenous to be seen as worthy. An advancement of these colonial products (of a certain cultural ethos) meant the dismantling or the proselytization of indigenous products in the colonies.
This static position of colonial centres has much to do with the power exerted by these countries, which is unprecedented in the colonial history of the world, and unfortunately seems to have been missed by historians to be of any value. Western colonialism could only become multidimensional instruments, working with many fingers, due to the security of its location, away from the colonies. And therefore could exercise their "capillaries of power" to use a Foucauldian analogy with such extreme success.

This success was also maintained through a sustained technological advancement in navigation – ship building, since the beginning, to industrial engineering, and much later locomotion and even advances in medicine and firepower (Young 30). With these advances the colonial powers could tighten the grip upon large geographical regions and populations (Young 16). A tight grip on a population, and ability to mobilize infantry and military might, in less time than ones opponents would have provided a great deal of security to the colonizing powers. It is this sense of security in ones military might, that fueled cultural superiority. And ushered in an unprecedented era of colonialism that the world had ever witness, where "Cultural and educational imperialism were its essential adjuncts" (Young 30 [Said 1993]). It was therefore possible to exert western ideology upon a race of people. In fact the proselytization into Christianity was far less successful in comparison to the proselytization into a westernized subject. Thus, if westernization was to be read as a proselytizing religion, it would have been the fastest growing religion during the colonial era, and indeed well into the neo-colonial era of today.

Nevertheless, it was the three tire security barrier that the colonizing nations felt: distanced from their colonies, secured through a military and technological superiority, and, intellectual cultural and Christian morality; that gave way to western morality and along with it western ideology of rule, history, trade and culture. It is this aspect that also brought about change in colonialism and ushered in the age of imperialism. Young, makes a clear distinction between colonialism and imperialism:

"Here a basic difference emerges between an empire that was bureaucratically controlled by a government from the centre, and..."
which was developed for ideological as well as financial reasons, a structure that can be called imperialism, and an empire that was developed for settlement by individual communities or for commercial purposes by a trading company, a structure that can be called colonial. Colonization was pragmatic and until the nineteenth century generally developed locally in a haphazard way, while imperialism was typically driven by ideology from the metropolitan centre and concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power (Young 16).

It is this fixture and security that defined the metropolitan centre that allowed these colonial powers to propagate ideology and subsequently making the shift to imperialism, where colonial culture is later exerted. When and where this shift actually takes place can be subject for many debates. Young cites Conrad, that by 1899 the difference between colonialism and imperialism was blurred. And that “the ‘idea’ of imperialism was to redeem the plunder of colonialism precisely at the moment when that plunder had been extended into a hegemonic world political system”. He also cites Koebner and Schidt who “suggest that between 1840 and 1960 the word changed its meaning no less than twelve times” (Young 25). But it is clear that an accumulation of wealth and power and security marked this brutal shift and brought about the belief in cultural superiority among colonizing nations. And the crumbling of colonial imperialism began only after this security was breached by the terrorizing resistance in the colonies and after WWII.

This is why, resistance to colonialism took the shape of ideological resistance to economic conditions, by the material humanistic resistance of Marxism and also identity based nationalistic resistance and religious resistance against Christian high morality. Again these are larger trends, each of which can be a subject of a thesis, and of which neither can be discussed without the other, due to the overlapping of one with the other. But to collapse these trends into exclusively Marxist or just nationalist trends would be equally misleading. However, since the course of my project is to outline a history of literary theory, namely: the intellectual events and ideas that the discipline uses as its resources. I will outline these trends in general and become
specific where the trends overpower or rather influence the construction of literary
theory in our discipline today, which I will only discuss after presenting the historical
legacies that is significant to the formation of literary theory.

Resistance:

Resistance to colonialism therefore began with colonialism itself. For instance,
resistance to the colonial moral obligation, better known as the civilizing mission, was
initially met on religious grounds. The natives', willingness to conform to all
Christian customs but not to the Sacrament, because the Europeans ate cows,
can be seen as some of the initial forms of resistance (Bhabha 120a). Here
colonial Christian morality is met with indigenous notions of morality. However,
"since 1848, the year of 'the war of the races', ethnic nationalisms had been asserting
their forces of disruption against steadily weakening imperial power within Europe
(Young 118 [Young 1995a: 120])."

According to Young "For much of the twentieth century, it was Marxism alone
which emphasized the effects of the imperialist system and the dominating power
structure involved, and in sketching out blueprints for a future free from domination
and exploitation, and most twentieth-century anti-colonial writing was inspired by the
possibilities of socialism". It was the Marxist critique of economic practices of
capitalism, advocated by the colonial regimes, which became a platform for debate
both in practice and at the intellectual level. (Young 6).

Among Marxist the role of nationalism was highly contested. Marx and Lenin viewed
nationalism as a marker for the revolutionary potential of a colony (107). they
however were opposed to any notion of cultural autonomy, and dismissed the idea of
a national culture as bourgeois (Young 121). Marxist such as M.N.Roy believed that
bourgeois lead nationalistic movements were incapable of an international socialist
revolution and would inevitably revert back to a bourgeois led capitalist state (Young
107, 131). In other words, interventions, re-tailoring, and fine-tuning of Marxist
ideology was being done in various alternative colors and flavors to meet local political demands and cultural specificities. The legacy of such reworking is apparent not only in postcolonialism and subaltern studies, but this acceptance of Marxism, its extension to a limit that just falls short of outright rejection of Marxism, is seen in many of the philosophical schools of thought which originated with a Marxist ideology, such as the Prague school, the Frankfurt School; to even structuralism and poststructuralism, feminism and other epistemological trends which have influenced literary theory today. (This will be shortly discussed in chapter II).

The communist internationals leading to the Baku Congress, provided a political platform at a large international scale to articulate anti-colonial responses. Although these meets had a checkered history in terms of its success, failures, and even the heterogeneous ideological makeup of its delegates with the formation of the Third International. At times positions taken by the delegates were even contradictory among themselves, and even at times to communism itself. However, its anti-colonial and anti-imperial world view, and of course membership to the communist party was a binding factor (Young 130). The Baku Congress of 1920 brought together, bourgeois nationalists, political and religious intellectuals, and even some of the first feminist activists. In these conferences, the issues that were debated included the structure of colonialism in its various manifestation and setups in different countries, the forms of exploitation, and the strategies that were to be employed to start the international revolution and neutralize all oppressive systems for good (Young 132). Therefore gradually an intellectual alternative discourse was gaining international grounds against colonialism, and was being fueled by Marxist ideology, which was already moving away from any notion of classical Marxism. It is specifically this trend which resurfaces in identity politics today.

During the Baku Congress feminist issues were heard given the fifty five women delegates present. “... the communist commitment to women’s equality was consistent and thoroughgoing, and one without question unmatched by any other political party then or since” (Young 143). The later rapid success of resistance to colonial movements, and later nationalist movements, after the Second World War,
could not have taken place without the informed political and intellectual infrastructure provide by the world Marxist congresses that had taken place in the previous years. It is for this very reason that Young believes it is important to consider the practical mechanisms of anti-colonial resistance, "the means through which ideas of resistance were put into place at an organizational level and turned into practice" (Young 154).

According to Young:

With some exceptions, Marxism historically provided the theoretical inspiration and most effective political practice for twentieth-century anti-colonial resistance. Its great strength was that its political discourse constituted an instrument through which anti-colonial struggle could be translated from one colonial arena to another. Far more than nationalism, which by definition was self-centered and in dialogue only with its own constituency. Marxism supplied a translatable politics and political language through which activists in very different situations could communicate with each other; it offered a universal medium through which specificities could be discussed in a common forum of anti-colonialism (Young 169).

It is these processes, which continue not only in postcolonial theory today but even in other bands of identity politics, which have come to incorporated into the study of literary theory. In fact, with the non-Marxist nationalist movements of India, such as "Nehru's socialist secularism, Jinnah's reformist Islam, and Savarkar's religious communalism" (Young 169), which were all brought on a common platform with Gandhi, with the exception of a very specific count of scholars in India, these ideas have not caused the same serious intellectual intervention into postcolonial or literary theory when compared to that of Marxism (171). Of course this brand of Marxism which is pursued is far from the classical Marxism and the European Marxist interventions that developed in Europe. According to Abdel-Malek, "what theoretical work has been done has had little relation to revolution" and Marxism in the three
continents (Asia, Africa and South America) “appeared as a form of radical nationalism” (171).

**Nationalism**

However, towards the end of the Second World War, resistance to colonialism had taken on a new narrative. The initial Marxist impetus became less dominant and at times replaced by a poetic narrative of ethnic identity, bound by the reaction to colonial racial superiority (difference), and a look back into one's own culture and tradition as something more dear and righteous. The leaders of these movements became iconic figures and their romanticized struggles became more appealing to the masses than the intellectualism of Marxism (Young 206). Thus, Gandhi, Omar Mukhtar, Fanon, Che Guevara are followed in the masses for their passion and troubles. For either being pushed out of a train in the case of Gandhi, or spending years in captivity and away from a starving but loyal wife in the case of Che, for their martyrdom and fight against oppression (Young 206).

In theory they are read for the intellectual discourse surrounding their life. In fact with regard to human history, there always seems to be a repulsion towards intellectualism and affection for the simple story-like narrative. The ‘story’ emotes and stirs a mass (of both literate and illiterate) as passion will always be more appealing – childlike, innocent and loveable – and deemed more real than a rational intellectual bureaucracy. This probably is an always already triumph of body over soul even before the problem of choosing between one over the other was conceived. Through extension, matter over mind, practice over theory. And to make an overpassionate hasty generalization worth making at this moment, that the core issue of whether or not theory should be a necessary part of literary studies may just be an extension of this very argument. Of course, the devil is known to be more appealing, but that should not take much away from such an argument, especially when ironically the devil has always been portrayed by literature as being successful with the intellectuals than with the simple. Then again, the reason could be to make passion seem more appealing!
Neocolonialism

After the end of colonialism, Neocolonialism, imperialism, race, cultural and gender superiority was the immediate aftermath that was felt. Resistance was mounted against these dominant colonial relics. Some parts of literary theory, whether effective or not, is an intellectual resistance to these trends. Within a few years of liberation, many of these newly independent countries realized that an economic independence was far from being won. These countries witness the start of what Nkrumah called Neocolonialism where the countries economic and political systems are directed through international capital controlled by former colonial powers (Young 46).

Thus the colonization of the world’s system of commerce and trade and international capital, in other words, the dominant economic system that prevails till today, and the economic disparity that it has come to create, was contested most severely at the international level not only by the Marxist intellectuals but also the bourgeois nationalists. This again formed the epistemological backbone for postcolonial studies and continues to be inscribed within the parameters of the ontology of literary theory. The teleological interventions to literary theory which attack the latter however, is a development that comes much later in the “life and times” of theory and will be discussed later.