Chapter II

Road to Literary Theory

I would like to remind myself that I believe the primary distinction between a pre 1960’s theory of literature and a post 1960’s literary theory is that the pre 1960’s theory of literature is dominated by the secular, platonic, and Hellenic tradition, and made to be driven by a nationalistic agenda. Whereas the post 1960’s theory, is based on a paradigmatic emphasis on language, and the understanding of language as a system of arbitrary signs. This does not mean that literary theory after the 1960’s is void of secularism, humanism or nationalist agenda, but I will try to show that the paradigm or the foundation of the post 1960 theories do not lay in these ideas. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the pre 1960’s ‘theory of literature’ and the post 1960’s ‘literary theory’, and the paradigmatic shift that takes place in literary scholarship with the entry of linguistics—and the subsequent developments in the understanding of language as a human faculty.

But before I continue, I would like to add that in the first chapter, I have tried to discuss the secular ‘rites’ that were responsible in bringing English literature in its disciplinary formulation. This was important since the entry point and function of literary theory cannot be established effectively without a basic understanding, of the context of the discipline in which it enters. The formulation of English studies as a discipline therefore becomes a relevant issue in this project. I have therefore touched upon the struggles between the Hellenic and the Hebraic and the influence of Christianity in the study of English literature and also the English nationalist agenda, that profess theoretical notions, whose basis may well have been myths and legends, both religious, national, anti-Semitic and so on. I also went on to show how the latter ideas have formulated various theoretical postulates in the formation of the literary canon and the study of English literature and literary criticism; and more specifically how these postulates can be termed theories of their own. However, I have yet to make any comment, even superficial ones, on the platonic attributes and theoretical postulates, drawn from platonic and Aristotelian philosophy on drama and poetry and
other theories incorporated into the readings of literature. I have avoided this discussion in the first chapter only because I felt that the basis of modern western knowledge and especially, English literature, rests a great deal on platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, in both its acceptance and reaction to it, and naturally, a great deal of theoretical work about literature stems from platonic paradigms and Aristotle’s commentaries about drama and art. These provide the epistemological basis of the many currents of thought that prevailed throughout western academia. This is a very broad topic and an integral part of my thesis, and could not be dealt with in an introductory chapter.

However, one of the major premises of my argument remains the same, that the ‘theory of literature’, the term which I will use to refer to the pre-1960’s theory and ‘literary theory’ as practiced after the 1960’s is to a great degree a renunciation of platonic theories of language and literature which were the basis of literary scholarship of many years. I will now elaborate this point in the first part of this chapter.

Therefore, the outline of this chapter will be as follows: first, I will discuss in detail the platonic and Aristotelian theories of literature, and the epistemological paradigms upon which these theories rest. This will constitute a discussion of mimesis, unity, subjectivity, objectivity, meaning, tradition, speech and interpretation, concepts of beauty, rhetoric and oratory – all of which can be accommodated within the meta-theoretical idea of representation. This idea has influenced thinkers as disparate as Byron, Coleridge, the two Schlegels and Schelling to Kant, Kierkegaard and Sartre. I will show how a great deal of literary criticism practiced in English departments around the world follows this strand of thought and how the idea of representation becomes the foundation of a ‘theory of literature’, but not the foundation for ‘literary theory’.

I will then explain how the new readings and understanding of language in the 1900s has lead to a paradigmatic shift and led theories of literature away from the platonic and Aristotelian paradigms (of representation), towards what I would like to call
'literary theory'. The pivotal point in this paradigm shift, I believe, is the reading of language as an arbitrary system of signs. In this chapter, I will also be discussing at length the arbitrary nature of language and the meaning of the term ‘arbitrary’ and ‘paradigm shift’. And as a result of such a reading, why and how a great many ideas based on Platonic and Aristotelian theories of literature have been subverted. This will constitute the epistemological changes in the study of language and literature.

Along with this, I will then move into a brief discussion about the many phases in the evolution of literary theory from the 1900’s till the time it is institutionalized in the classrooms of English departments after the 1960s. By doing so, I will try to delineate the historical and political and geographical influence that the epistemology of theory has been subjected to vis-à-vis its theorists. The belief that non-epistemological influences can have important effects on the epistemological thought process, is a development of the modern era. The formation of a discipline or the changes that affect scholarship are many-a-times-the effect of external currencies and demands. However, this continues to be an area that has been overlooked by many commentators and theorists who have written about the advent of theory.

**Representation**

Unity, subjectivity and representation are all a part of Greek idealism, and are the basis of secular English literary scholarship. As a result, the latter in turn has tremendously influenced literary criticism. Platonic philosophy, which describes the work of an artist as the imitation of an imitation; where the artistic creation is thrice removed from the notion of reality, whether in acceptance or in denial, has continued to surface throughout the history of continental literature and specifically English literature. Here, the unfathomable embodiment of an absolute truth is manifested in nature, while the artistic creation imitates nature and truth in order to represent the absolute. This inductive leap of faith taken in the construction of this idealistic world view has of course undergone tremendous changes, and need not to be elaborated here. However embedded in this view, the idea that the artist represents a world view, or a human condition has been central to literary creation and appreciation.
In English literature, it is worthy to keep in mind that the word ‘representation’ has always had a highly specialized meaning. It ought not to be confused with the everyday verb form of the word ‘represent’. The word representation, a noun, can be traced back to the Platonic idea of forms. Further, keeping this point in mind, I would like to turn to Raman Selden’s definition of the word, where according to him, representation, “could mean to give a pictorial rendering or symbolization of external objects, or to reveal the general and universal features of human nature, or to present the ideal forms which lie behind the external objects, or to reveal the general and universal features of human nature, or to present the ideal forms which lie behind the external objects of the natural world” (Selden 7).

By briefly analyzing the different trends, known as movements, in the development of canonical English literary scholarship, and especially literary appreciation and subsequently criticism, (why a particular work has come to attain a certain degree of value or acceptance, during a certain period) one can see how the view of literature as a form of representation is developed in literary studies.

For example, during the neo-classical period the best piece of literature was thought to imitate, and therefore represent, nature and truth. Thus, the most accurate or most honest representation of nature becomes the best piece of art. This idea continues well throughout the Age of Reason and beyond. The poems of Dryden and Pope, were revered for their high moral stands, and others like them, together were seen as the upholders of societies morals and conscience. Of course, they totally ignored the human social and psychological aspect, which was foundational among those who are referred to as the Romantics (Selden 79).

The Romantics, placed their emphasis on imaginative creation and human expression; the individual as opposed to the collective. In fact, M. H. Abrams in, The Mirror and the Lamp, speaks of this very shift, as a shift from a theory of imitation to a theory of human expression, or “from the mechanistic metaphorical analogies of neoclassicism
to the biological imagery of the Romanticists", a shift of perspective, from the mirror to the lamp (Wellek 214). However, this shift from a mirror to the lamp, or imitation to expression, although paramount in literary criticism or in the judgment and perception of literary value, is rooted in the idea of literature as representation. Representation was almost too commonsensical an idea in both the Neo-Classical and Romantic era of English literary historiography. For what else could the role or reason for literature possibly be? This commonsensical view of literature as representation finds support in the parallel development of continental philosophy that influenced the poets who reacted against the neo-classicists. Again, Selden writes,

at the end of the eighteenth century German Romanticism provided the vital philosophical impetus to the developments in other European countries. Kant's philosophy, and the critical writings of Schelling and the two Schlegels were major influences on English Romanticism. Friedrich Schlegel follows the Platonic tradition of representation, but insists that 'things of commonplace, and every day occurrence' should be presented as having as high a significance and as deep a purpose as the stories of kings and legendary heroes. Wordsworth's early poetry embodies this theory in practical form (Selden 10).

Thus the Romantic Movement, another trend that can be seen in literary history, continues in the process of representation, even in all its changes. Therefore the paradigm of viewing literature as representative of something, whatever that something maybe, continues. This representation of organic nature predates the Enlightenment and its strong undercurrents in both the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and is neo-platonic in its decent (Wellek 196). But before this is explained in detail, it is important to understand the timing of the Romantic Movement and its effect on the development of literary scholarship, since the epistemology of literature, with rationalism as its bedrock, is affected by epistemological influences.

The hegemony exercised by the Romantics in the study of English literature and formulating the criteria of criticism is striking. James Montgomery, in his Lectures
on General Literature (1833), "described the age since Cowper as the third era of modern literature. Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge are called the "three pioneers, if not the absolute founders, of the existing style of English literature ... the "age from Dryden to Pope" is called the worst" (in Wellek 155). According to Wellek, similar trends are found all over Europe. An instance of the latter reasoning can be seen in the much widely held view that, poetry becomes knowledge of the deepest reality (Wellek 160). The Romantic Movement in literature, which began to dominate the literary scene in Britain in the very early 1800's, coincided with the hegemonic rise of British imperialism at around the same time. It reached its culmination point with the premiership of Disraeli (accepted to be the father of British imperialism) in the late 1800's. At a similar time, as discussed earlier in Chapter I, English literature was being taught to promote colonial servitude in the colonies. Although the initial syllabi of literature, taught by Duff and other missionaries consisted of the works of Milton and Pope; later, at the insistence of the East India Company and with its view on teaching, a utility based secular discipline was chosen to be taught and this saw the incorporation of more texts from the writers of the day, the writings of which became collectively known, much later, as the Romantic Movement.

In other words, with the spread of institutions in the British Empire, naturally, more of the texts by the Romantic poets were taught. As a result, of this training in the literature of the Romantics, non-native students bred upon British colonial education began to carry the influence of the Romantic Movement into their own vernacular literature. Adopting and upholding critical values and standards of the hegemonic literature. The relationship between literary scholarship and colonial empire was a potent nexus, and its effect is deep rooted even among some of the greatest minds in literature in the colonies. For example, the influence of the Romantics can even be seen in the works of Michael Madhusudan Datta's, odes on Radha and Krishna in his Brajangana Kabya, and Rabindranath Tagore's, Briksa-bandana ('In Praise of Trees') (Radice 11). Tagore and Datta were of course, two of the foremost writers of the Bengali literary movement of their time. In fact, the definition of poetry became, by default, romantic poetry, for a very long time. Its seeming appeal of universal
humanism and timelessness of human, virtues and love, seeking otherworldly perfection through images and symbols and myths, almost touching upon mysticism at a time of colonial suppression and tyranny, may well have been its driving force. Of course, I don’t intend to suggest that humanist poets like Wordsworth and the rest were tyrannical colonizers themselves. But that in a colonial system anything can be usurped to advance the colonial purpose. Similarly, a discipline like English literature is not in any way sacrosanct or exempt from such a position (I will build up my argument in this project to show that, neither is literary theory exempt from this as well). Therefore, along with the learnt appreciation in values and virtues, the influence of power is evident in the “marketing” and marketability of the discipline of literature and in this case Romanticism. It is not the greatness of English literature, nor more specifically the Romantic movement, that leads to its spread but rather the universal humanistic appeal and its undercurrent in the politics of control that produces the discipline. Thus, an epistemological discussion of the dominance of the Romantic Movement can never completely explain its influence. External factors outside the basis of knowledge is always at work.

The appeal to Romanticism changed only with the start of the Modernist Movement, another trend; however, Romanticism’s resonance is heard even in some of the modern works of Elliot, such as *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Yeats’ *Sailing to Byzantium*, even when the modernists were writing as a reaction to the Romantics. The influence of the Romantics seems to subside only after the Existentialists begin to dominate the scene of literature. When imagination is viewed as an illusion and a distortion of the real and which is destroyed at the first contact with the absurdity of reality (Wellek 362). It is here that Kantian ideals of the truth, virtue and beauty, are subverted and given place to Sartre’s social theories, or to read it in another way, from the German idealists to the French social realists (and later poststructuralists). In such a rendition of literary chronology, one cannot but help to see the Modernist as a buffer between the two phases. However, in this brief and rapid timeline that I have discussed, what is evident is that in all of these movements or trends of literary production and appreciation, the idea of representation continue to prevail. Among
the Romantics, given their influence in the discipline of English literature, the idea of representation is sustained.

In other words, the picturisation of literary expression was unchallenged to the point of being formulaic. For example, the idea of poetic imagination, which was at the core of the writers of Romantic poetry, as mentioned earlier, was greatly influenced by German Romanticism, which was itself an influence of the writings of Kant along with the works of Shelling and the two Schlegels. The platonic tradition of representation is evident in the writings of these philosophers. For example, in The Critique of Judgement Kant writes “In order to decide whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation (my italics), not by the Understanding to the Object for cognition but, by the Imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the Understanding) to the subject, and its feeling of pleasure or Pain” (in Selden 247-248). Similarly, Coleridge who was deeply influenced by these philosophers argued that “all the principles of intelligence are inherent in nature before the act of consciousness arises, and that the act of intellectual apprehension involves the focusing of the images which impinge upon our consciousness” (Seldon 10). In other words, ideas are already manifest in nature and our surroundings even before we perceive them, imagination becomes an act of intelligence that focuses upon these natural images, and brings them to life through their subsequent representation. Similarly, Shelley held an even more ephemeral view of natural objects, seeing them as “unreal phantoms obscuring the eternal forms which are the true objects of poetic vision” (in Selden 11). This is contrary to the phenomenologist’s belief that phenomena can only be perceived and represented through our sense experiences, however, the contradictory viewpoints, both German in origin, are rooted in an understanding of literature as representation. Thus the English Romantics (and their continental philosophers), had a tremendous impact in the discipline of literature, supported by colonial forces (directly or indirectly, as discussed above), was totally founded upon the idea of representation.

Among the modernist poets, Yeats, Wallace Stevens, both of whom were influenced by the Art-for-Art’s-Sake movement, both held the view that the creative artist’s primary role is the “creation of the social consciousness of reality itself” – a capturing
of the social consciousness through the images of language and represent it in works of art (Selden 11, Wellek 180). Therefore, the Platonic and the Aristotelian influence and more specifically the idea of literature as a mode of representation, continue to surface throughout the history of English literature and criticism. It constitutes a theory of literature, and can be seen as the foundation of the universal secular humanistic and moralist tradition of criticism. It established a man centric theory of literature, which was thought to ennoble mankind, and uphold the appreciation of the highest values that man could attain. Thus the definition of valuable literature would naturally be seen as having the purpose to uphold that which is high and mighty in value. Similarly the purpose of criticism, and the role of the critic, was to identify and appreciate these values. This trend can be seen in Romantic criticism and practical criticism as well in the list of critics starting with Dr. Johnson, to Wordsworth and Coleridge, to Arnold, Eliot and all the way to Leavis. This constituted the bulk of British criticism and was practiced by the most influential academician in the United States, until the 1960’s. It is these ideas of high values (high seriousness) which are not rejected as such but have been undermined through the changes and advancements of philology and the logic and understanding of literary creation.

However, in western metropolitan departments of English during the 1960’s, the idea of value, based on representation, was being challenged to the point of almost being overthrown from its pedestal, with the heightened interest in continental linguistic theory – the influx of which began in the 1920’s (Seldon 4). I will now be explaining the reshuffle of ideas in the area of literary criticism that takes place, shortly however here, I would like to explain the pivotal point of how the idea of literature as representation, is challenged by these new continental ideas. It is through this explanation that I will try to separate theory in English literature: from a ‘theory of literature’ to ‘literary theory’.

The Arbitrariness of language

Ferdinand de Saussure, in his theory of the system of language (which he terms as langue) and its operation, explains that language does not operate by representing or
corresponding to actual things (which he calls a referent). He explains language as being a system of signs that work though a process of differentiation, where the sign is a bipartite structure consisting of a signifier and a signified. The signifier being the acoustic image, while the signified being the idea or concept of the referent, together, the signifier and the signified are like two sides of the same sheet of paper (Sassure in Selden 344). Therefore, language arises when utterances (parole), units of sound, are made capable of being received by another person. And therefore, language is not a connection between words, and the referent the words represent (Selden 96).

Language therefore, is an arbitrary connection between sounds and ideas. But what, exactly, is implied by this thesis of the arbitrariness of language? Language therefore becomes a system “devoid of ontological weight” (Sturrock 8). This means that words are not influenced, or determined by what they represent. In other words, there is no intrinsic or essential building block of language other than, signs (which includes sound notations). These signs are fixed through a general consensus. It is this consensus that allow the unit of sound to become a sign, and embodies sense, and differentiates it from being mere noise. Similarly, sense without sign is inconceivable.

The idea of sound in language is complex. Sound becomes an acoustic sign that conveys a certain sense, just like twitching ones forehead in front of a 3 year old, would convey a sense of anger through a visual sign. The sign can also be tactile, and therefore signs do not have to be in the form of sound waves, that are picked up by the human ears. The structure of language and the individual sound notations by themselves are quite meaningless outside the totality of their system. Therefore, “In the course of the present century language has passed from being the transparent, presumably indifferent medium of thought to being a central and intractable problem of philosophy” (Sturrock 25). This in no way implies that the understanding of the limitations of language was expounded in the last 100 years. Francis Bacon, in the 1600’s wrote, “Men imagine that their minds have the command of language, but it often happens that language bears rule over their minds”. The conditioning of human thought through the limits of language has been well known, as this quotation suggests. Wittgenstein writing approximately 300 years later says something similar:
“the limits of my language are the limits of my world” and also that “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language”.

In both cases, this inability of human language to accommodate human expression becomes the very concern, which had shifted the perspective of language as a vehicle of transfer, to language as a system worthy and wanting for study in itself. However, these advances were only gaining currency in the 1900s. The relationship between knowledge and language is interrogated, given the realization that different languages will provide different perceptions and notions of reality and thus truth. In addition, that truth is a concept constructed and accommodated within languages. Thus literature which is constructed through a medium of language, cannot be seen as representative of anything except a form or a process, which is very different from the pictorial image of literature that has been represented all along in the discipline of English literature.

Given such an interpretation of language, or poetry or any other form of literary expression, constructed through the medium of language, can no longer be seen to represent nature or truth – as the neo-classicists believed. Similarly, the human consciousness or concepts of the sublime, negative capability; in other words, the symbiosis between the imagination of man and nature (human consciousness and organic creation) which was believed to be missing in the neo-classicists and ever prevalent in the Romantics, equally is not feasible of representation, if the arbitrariness of language is kept in mind. The social consciousness, human psychology in its fragments and missing links of civilization that mark the work of the modernists, and even the portrayal of a hostile world by the existentialists, are all embedded in the idea of a gloomy picturesque representation of the world, social didacticism and concepts of truth – all these concepts begin to break down the strongly held notion of seeing literature as representative of the human condition, given the inability of language to work through symbolism.

The idea of literature not representing, society, an event, an episode or even a piece of life, a portrait or a picture or image, of a human condition, becomes a very difficult
notion to accommodate in the study of literature. But it is an idea that developed out of Saussure's own developments in linguistics. These ideas were first taken up by a group of scholars who were later collectively known as the formalists (discussed in detail below). They lay emphasis, on the form of the literary piece, rather than the picturesque content, while shifting its perspective away for the meaning of the literary text, or poem in question. Thus, the formalists were least concerned to view literature as a representation of an experience. They concerned themselves with the "literary process" and thus focused on the style of the literary text, or in other words, the structure of the language that forms the literary text (Selden 269). This separation between form and content, or a choice of style over plot and characterization may not have caught on in its original state in literary scholarship due to its mechanistic trait, however, the possibility of an alternative study of literature, closer to the new understandings of the mechanism of human language did continue to develop.

Thus, the arbitrariness of language becomes the threshold or the marker that separates theory with specific reference to literature as a discipline. Therefore, Platonic and Aristotelian theories, myths, legends, symbolism, and other ideas, philosophies and theories that I have discussed so far, in the understanding and appreciation of English literature, which has changed tremendously over time, have all been, embedded in the concept of literature as a form of representation. Thus the theories that have developed, that explain literature, can be collectively referred to as theories of literature. To call it literary theory would tantamount to missing an epistemological barrier.

Again, keeping the arbitrariness of language in mind, the long cherished concept of representation, a foundation of literature and the foundation of the great bulk of literary criticism, is not only challenged but also almost uprooted. In fact, the question of representation ceases to exist, and with the advancements of Sassure's work, and the subsequent development of these ideas in literature by the Formalists, the platonic ideals of representation are contested. And the perception that there can be no literature of representation since language does not work by symbolizing objects but by producing 'difference', begins to gain ground (Selden 7).
Therefore, criticism which centers its discourse upon appreciation and value judgments, which are in turn based upon social, religious, humanist, naturalist or any other representation of human consciousness or condition, at the linguistic level becomes an object of suspect. It is at this very point where the linguistic discourse penetrates literary scholarship and counters the methodology of literary representation which dominated literary publication and literary criticism, until the 1960’s in departments of English, around the world.

In fact it is this arbitrariness which constitutes the system of signs, the bar which separates the 'theory of literature', from 'literary theory', which developed after the 1960's, began its gestation period in the 1900’s. Therefore, those who say literary theory has always been around are drawing imaginary lines between points of theoretical development over hundreds of years, to subsequently form a meta-narrative of theory. By doing so, they would be ignoring the ruptures, the contradictions and the historicity and historical circumstances that have given rise to dissident claims (as all new ideas begin with dissident claims), and also will be ignorant of the time in which these views are established and gather power, dominance of thought and become a defining principle of thought for other ideas (discourse). These become the brighter centers of light, like clusters of light with varying intensities and greatness in variety rather than one continuous formulae for something that tries to combine all.

The search for a methodology to understand the workings of literature, keeping the Saussurian paradigms of language or the arbitrariness of language in mind, therefore led to the rise of 'literary theory'. One of the claims of this matter can be seen in the fact that the theories that have arisen are very distinct from the 'theory of literature' that was pivoted in the idea of representation. It is possible to feel that instead of making a distinction in a 'theory of literature' and 'literary theory', why not simply term literary theory as just another advancement in the theory of literature, which is not based on representation but on language. However, this would be an insufficient terming of a discourse, given the developments that takes place in literary scholarship,
and since ‘literary theory’ entered literary scholarship as a distinct part of the discipline along with literary history and criticism.

What I have discussed accordingly is the epistemological entry point of literary theory in English studies. However, this entry was not simply epistemological in its pursuit, nor even in the effect and influence it had on literary studies. (I will show in the next chapter how even in identity studies, which maybe seen as resonance coming from ‘literary theory’, is not a relapse back to the ideas of literature as representation, but rather to an idea of literature as misrepresentation. However literary misrepresentation, unlike literary representation is not a concern of imagination and symbolism but a question of language and power; its development will also be discussed in the later chapters).

So far, I have tried to establish three points in my discussion. First, I have tried to show how literature began as a discipline of study, with its geographical, political and social rationale and how it has always continued to be influenced by these elements. I have then tried to delve deep into the disciplinary questions that have been raised in English literature over the ages and which now constitute the part of literary scholarship known as criticism. I have then tried to show the entry point at where ‘literary theory’ enters literary scholarship, and how ‘literary theory’ is different from any ‘theory of literature’ in the past. I would now like to narrate the development and constituents of ‘literary theory’. Although similar accounts can be found in numerous other books, this narrative will be important as a balance for the next chapter, in which I discuss the detractors of theory, such a complete account of which cannot be found in any other book, to my knowledge.

**Developments of Literary Theory**

Many writers dealing with literary theory may have cited the idea that language is an ‘arbitrary system of signs’ as postulated by Saussure, however, explaining this theory or rather the work of Saussure, they have placed much emphasis on the system and
sign, quite rightfully as Saussure himself had done so. However, in the further development of theory especially poststructuralism, the natural extension of structuralism, has dealt in depth with the idea of the sign and the system. The concept of the arbitrariness of language is the concept that resonates in the entire gamut of literary theory and that has evolved in the English discipline since the 1960's.

I have been using the year 1960's constantly and quite liberally, as if it is a real point of rupture in literary scholarship. However, no historical survey which uses dates to mark events believes in the extreme compartmental attribute of an event represented by a year or a date. A year or a particular date may be used as a marker of a particular event to designate possibly a rise in the popularity of its trend. For example, during the Romantic Movement in literary history, which is seen as a reaction against the general belief of a preceding neo-classical era, does not imply the strict end of neo-classical kind of poetry. In fact many elements in the works of Byron, one of the later Romantic poets, contains elements which were neo-classical in taste (for instance, the topical referencing in *Don Juan*, and the use of the heroic couplet at various points, to cite just two examples). Therefore, no movement begins or ends with any particular date. Like a spectrum of light or any color gradient, there is a always a continuous flow from one point to another, ironically it is a transition that marks the changes. A transition, like a buffer point, which is meant to contain elements of both the changed and the unchanged becomes the marker of change. Thus, every time a new trend appears, it does not mean that an earlier trend is completely over; however, its popularity may diminish. In a similar light, this does not mean that, in my use of the 1960's, as a point of entry for literary theory in the discipline of English literature, ought to be seen as metaphorical or symbolic. It is quite real, and does constitute a watershed, in the history of literary scholarship and more specifically, in the “life and times” of literary theory. The 1960's marks a great deal of social, political and geographical upheavals in many parts of the world, and these upheavals have also lead to changes in the way we view English literature and the subsequent development of the discipline of English scholarship. These changes run parallel to some of the epistemological changes that had taken place in literature that I have discussed above, the social events of which, I will discuss soon. But literary theory
can be said to have begun with the formalist in the 1920's. However, its popularity and entry into the classrooms of English departments, began in the mid 1960s.

Some scholars have used the year 1966, that denotes the presentation of Derrida's seminal paper at a seminar in Johns Hopkins University, as the point of poststructuralism and therefore theory, while others use 1968 as its point of commencement, when literary theory as a discipline was established by the Yale School. However, by localizing ones discussion around these points, gives the impression that the advent of theory in literary scholarship was only a philosophical or epistemological development, which is actually a grave reduction in the vastness of literary scholarship.

My argument here is very simple, English literature which developed not only as a pursuit towards a discipline of knowledge, as I had shown earlier, but found its utility in colonial discourse, had socio-historical-and geographical forces in its constitution as a discipline, and was made to seem worthy and useful for study. Similarly, the rise of literary theory as part of literary scholarship, was also formulated in a socio-historical and geographical context and was constantly subjected to these effects, and continue to be influenced, in its perception and development, by these elements. In fact the politics of literature and the politics of literary criticism and theory is only now being questioned, and a great deal of other questions remain still to be asked. Therefore, the use of particular dates or years to mark an entry point of theory, like 1966 or 1968, as opposed to a decade, while pointing to the philosophical development of literary theory, seems to erase any notion of the time, place, and politics, which raised certain notions and encouraged a particular line of thought, and allowed it to prevail. Therefore the loosely used term of the 1960's as I have done so, should also bring into an informed readers mind the other general events taking place in international and national political events around the world. These events, I will show, are as relevant as the epistemological developments taking place in literary scholarship. Therefore, academicians, and education institutions are not stuck in ivory towers as, it is made to seem. The condemnation lies in the fact that institutions of any kind, cannot be contained in the comfortable zones of ivory. The human
thought process is complex and impressionable, and it is close to being impossible to
be confined within its own precincts, shut out from what may seem to be other
“irrelevant” factors. It is as if the free floating ship of objectivity is anchored from all
sides by the fetters of subjectivity or directed by the rudder of subjectivity.

I will now begin a general survey of the development of literary theory, however,
unlike most other books that delineate the epistemological development of the
‘theoretical enterprise’ (I use this words purposefully, and will come to it later), I will
incorporate where necessary, the socio-historical and political aspects that have
influenced its development. This aspect is seldom, if ever, and when referred, is
sparsely treated as an after effect, with little or no relevance. Literary theorists seem
to have a compulsion to discuss theory, only in its theoretical frame work, as a large
group of English writers and critics have concentrated only on the literary elements of
literature. The vastness of literature or even the theoretical postulates of literature
cannot really be narrowed by these perspective. Literary scholarship is a discipline so
vast in its scope that it cannot always be rightly packed for disciplinary purposes,
without some form of subjective judgment. But that the idea that theory ought to be
studied in literature as a separate part of its scholarship is evident, when we see some
of the books that were appearing on the topic.

**Reading Wellek**

Rene Wellek along with Austin Warren wrote an exceptionally foresighted book in
1949 titled *Theory of Literature*. However, Wellek, part of the Parague School who
later relocated to America and remained there, always had a very close relationship
with the advances in linguist theories of literature and the formalist pursuit of trying to
find the literariness in the language of literature. These groups of linguists can very
well be seen as the alchemists of English literary theory, along with their fundamental
research in the area. Wellek and Warren’s book is important. However, in this book,
although the ingenuity of Wellek and Warren lies in their foresightedness, that
collectively the work of these new language critics was much different from anything
done by their predecessors and that it could be said to constitute a completely new
area in the discipline of theory, by 1949 the threads and direction of literary theory were still coming together. In other words, 1949 was eleven to fifteen years too soon to publish a book with the title ‘Theory of Literature’ with any implication that it constitutes a survey of literary theory. A study of literary theory is more resourcefully treated in probably what is Wellek’s most outstanding book on the topic, Concepts of Criticism. First published in 1963 and reprinted five times by 1969. On hindsight, this book appears at a time when the forces of theory were being formulated, and also captures many of the trends that went into making this part of the discipline as we know it today. Very few writers today if any have taken a detailed look into Wellek’s interpretation of literary history, since the latter seems to be a study in the past. Although I do not make any audacious claim to pick up where Wellek left off, an endeavor, given my location in South Asia, which makes it close to impossible due to the lack of resources, I can however (and do so), use this very location as a comment upon the tentacles of literary scholarship and more specifically literary theory and its effect upon the readers in this part of the globe.

Wellek’s main concern in his Concepts of Criticism is the methods of studying literary works. Literary history, theory and criticism according to Wellek are the only tools in hand that can be used to study literature and to solve the problems of literature, through literary scholarship and the interpretation of literary works. History assists in understanding the aims of a period and the self-consciousness of authors, but is not binding to interpretation.

For an example, in a defense of literary historiography he says “to interpret Hamlet only in terms of what the very hypothetical views of Shakespeare or his audience were is asking us to forget three hundred years of history. It prohibits us to use the insights of a Goethe or Coleridge, it impoverishes a work which has attracted and accumulated meanings in the course of history. But again this history itself, however instructive, cannot be binding on us: its authority is open to the same objections as the authority of the author’s contemporaries. There is simply no way of avoiding judgment by us. By myself” (Wellek 17).
In trying to explain the methodological importance of literary history, he shows how through a historical analysis of the development of the term Baroque, the various uses of the term Baroque can be seen as an illustration of one aspect of what literary history can consist of; and the relevance of such an analysis in literary scholarship. He goes on to show in details how in different countries and periods, its use was identified or associated with, and how a movement away from "the dependence of most literary history from periodisations derived from political and social history" (Wellek 114). For example, he says

In the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries the adjective "baroque" was widely used as an equivalent of "bizarre," and the noun "baroque" becomes established as a term for "bad taste" in architecture, at first hardly distinguished from "Gothic" or "rococo." ... Nietzsche recognizes a baroque stage in art after the Renaissance, which he, however, conceives also as a recurrent phenomenon in history, occurring always at the decadence of great art as a decline into rhetoric and theatricality (Wellek 116).

For Wellek, the greatest and most timeless problem of literary scholarship has been its inability to identify a discrete methodology for the study of literature and the attainment of "a general and complete awareness of the basic concepts on which the three disciplines should be founded ...." (Wellek 225). A pragmatist like Fish would argue that the root of the power in literature lies in the fact that literature defies concreteness, while F.R. Leavis would argue that such line of thinking is unnecessary in literary scholarship and more in tune with the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy. (These ideas will be discussed fully in the next chapter).

Wellek in his criticism of the New Critics stated that one of the very important aspects of literary scholarship that each student of literature must face is the question of value. "... the literary student is confronted with a special problem of value; his object, the work of art, is not only value-impregnated, but is itself a structure of values. ... There is nothing which can obviate the necessity of critical judgment, the need of aesthetic
standards, just as there is nothing which can obviate the need of ethical or logical standards” (Wellek 15). The question of value wears a garb of immediateness. It is a matter of choice or judgment, based upon preferences or other values that we actually select what we think is valuable to us at the present. It cannot be a fixture, as values can and do change with the changing of other acquired notions of value. This is the very reason why there are dominant trends in literature at different times, like Neoclassicism or Romanticism. There are also changes in paradigms of thought and reasoning, as values and preferences change and shift and these changes in perspective are also a change in values, which in turn affect can affect an entire, informed reading population. Therefore, a question of value only wears a garb of immediateness but is actually influenced by other values of the past, much like ideology. Although the definition of what makes something valuable may be an epistemological search for truth, much in line with the practical critics attempt to establish ‘taste’, however, it is in an historical analysis that the changes of values and judgments can be used to delineate the markers of change and progression of literary discipline. This should not be a coercive force but it is a helpful one to understand a discipline

Therefore, it is not surprising to see Wellek at times reducing his argument to value judgments while merging the boundaries or trying to express the outgrowth or ingrowth of literary criticism and theory. He writes, “it seems to me that even a complete analysis of the structure of a work of art does not exhaust the task of literary scholarship. A work of art is a totality of values which do not adhere merely to the structure but constitute its very essence. All attempts to drain value from literature have failed and will fail because its very essence is value. Literary study cannot and must not be divorced from criticism, which is value judgment” (Wellek 68). Although he distinguishes criticism and theory quite emphatically, he is not able to distinguish a ‘theory of literature’ from ‘literary theory’.

A purpose that Wellek attributes to himself and others involved in literary scholarship is to build a system of principles, or a theory of values which will “necessarily draw on the criticism of concrete works of art and will constantly invoke the assistance of
literary history", while at the same time preserving the distinction between history, criticism and theory (Wellek 20). While neither one being replaced by the other.

**The Formalists: The Reaction to Representation**

The Russian Formalists, a movement suppressed in Russia, rejected the unsystematic, lofty and eclectic critical approaches which dominated the study of literature by their symbolist and anesthetist predecessors, who were concerned with the thematic scope, unity and concept of beauty in literature, and also ideology and psychology (Newton 1, Sturrock 100, Wellek 279). Between 1915 and 1930, there was a general appeal against any kind of orthodoxies in Europe. The driving force of this appeal was the enthusiasm with the 1917 Bolshevik revolution – the belief that a new millennium had commenced in the world. Thus, the years were marked with a radical iconoclasm that also influenced the study of language, literature and other epistemological areas (Sturrock 99).

The later formalists were also reacting at the same time to Marxist intellectualism and especially its affect on literary criticism. These theorists believed that Marxist criticism over emphasized the effect of economic and social changes in responding to literary works, and thus incorporating nonliterary methods and elements in the study of literature (Wellek 48, 279). The formalists were striving to create a science of literature through their preoccupation with the techniques and conventions of literature, trying to identify that fine line which separated literary language from non-literary language in a view to point out the literariness of language. Therefore, these formalists began to take a closer look at the ‘form’ of literary expression, believing that it was not only a container that would be used, to be filled with content. (Wellek 65). Thus for them, ‘form’ becomes, not only important, but inseparable from content, “where content implies some element of form” (Wellek 65). Therefore, while the events told in a novel becomes part of its content, the arrangement of the events into plot, becomes a part of Form. (Wellek 65).
This excessive objective view taken by the formalist was a reaction to the excessive subjective view of the prevailing critical styles of the time. This does not mean that the formalists viewed literature as being replenished with cognitive meaning and devoid of all emotive meaning, but felt literary scholarship was not as subjective as it was made to believe. In describing their work, B. M. Eichenbaum, a well known formalist, said: “What does characterize us is the endeavor to create an autonomous discipline of literary studies based on the specific properties of literary material” (Sturrock 100). These properties included, metrical structure, sound systems, style, composition, choice of topic, characterization, setting, plot and others whether considered to be part of the content of the literary text, or not, was treated as being part of the form and collectively directed to presume a certain effect in the literary text. Separately, these properties or devices were deemed independent, but in a literary text, their organization or structurization or distortion, becomes the most important aspect that make these devices attract the readers attention in the literary text, and making them “objects of aesthetic perception”. Therefore, the literary text and its specific literariness becomes the focus of literary study, and all other biographical and socio-historical elements, like the author and the age become superfluous external factors in the appreciation of the text. The history of literature becomes for these theorists a history of tradition and literary devices (Wellek 276).

This analysis of literary language as being special in its use, characterized by a purposeful “deformation” of ordinary speech was referred to as “organized violence”, by the formalists (Wellek 67). A concentration on form, and an isolation of literary devices and their use, naturally led the literary utterance away from questions of purpose, didacticism, or even a search for emotive meaning. The importance of literary representation or the pictorial representation of theme, morals, truths, ethics, authorial intention and so on, were to be brushed aside for a more “pure” understanding of the nature of literature and the literary process. It is here that for the first time, representation is sidelined for a more objective structure based study of literature. Unfortunately, however, by strictly adhering to the “literariness”, or the tectonics of literary production and appreciation, these theorists were condemned to understand the evolution of literature as a “self-evolving process” having only a
tangential relationship to the socio-historical process of societal development. The formation of canons the hegemony of literature, and misrepresentation, and politics, become unworthy for the Formalist to study.

It also brought about a change in the long standing idea of the unity of a literary text – an idea that resonates back to the Aristotelian theory of literature, and even though it was not strictly followed in English literature, however was central to the idea of representation. From the idea of an interdependence of time, action and space, to character, setting and plot; all inherent to the universal timeless appeal of literature that the logic of unity conveys, becomes marred. Unity becomes a linguistic application for the Formalist, and not a connection to the logic of literature. Thus literary representation and the widely dispersed theories of literature and criticism became close to irrelevant.

However archaic, some of these ideas may sound today, the most important aspect about formalism, is that it brought in the focus of language upon literary studies. In other words, the “obvious” role of language in literature, to construct an image or represent ideas was made to seem speculative and unnecessary and not worthy of much scholarship. It was beginning to be overlooked but in its place, an emphasis was made on the linguist structure of literature. It is here that I would like to add that if the theory of literature began with Plato or Aristotle, literary theory began with the formalists in what I term the gestation period of literary theory from the 1900s till the 1960’s.

Therefore, it has been the Formalists’ who have brought the study of the structure of the language of literature into the study of literature. This however is not surprising when one peers into the life of some of the leading Formalists of the time. For example, Roman Jakobson had his formative training in the study of philology, and the new advances in linguistic research was well known to him. This notion of viewing literature as a particular use of language, which also contained the limitations of language along with it, while condemning any privileging of content – meaning or purpose (Sturrock 100).
The act of peering at the words of the page rather than the message is a shift in focus that tantamounts to a shift in looking at the signified as opposed to the signifier (Sturrock 101). The Formalists’ practice of reading the text was therefore seen as the only true source through which the meaning of the text could be attained. They preferred to keep out all other possible influences of the text, like the history and the social context or age in which the text was produced, along with any influence of the author’s life on the text – which was seen as having little or no concern to its meaning and therefore subsequent interpretation. A similar reading of the text appears in the New Critics who themselves have been influenced a great deal by the Formalists.

According to the Formalists, a reader reading a literary text is forced to reconcile himself to the form of the language of the text, as opposed to just the message or the instruction of the text contained in the language, as would be the case if the reader happens to be reading a news article in a magazine or newspaper. And thus, the “distinctive use of language” becomes their marker for the literariness of literature (Sturrock 103). Although today, formalism is seen as a sterile methodology, some excellent work has been produced by those who adhered to its methodology. For example, in comparative studies between authors, their work becomes not just a series of parallel passages but a comparison of the relation between two totalities, in which they do not in any way reduce their arguments to hasty generalizations or rigid dogmatism (Wellek 279).

Russian formalism spread to Poland and Czechoslovakia during the interim period between the two world wars. Among the followers however, some began to feel that the literary form cannot be viewed as just an amalgamation of devices, solely linguistic. And that the formalist approach was dehumanizing as it overlooked a great deal of other aspects in literature like themes, motifs and characters, aspects that seemed intrinsic to literature. Therefore, to touch upon what they deemed to be, the totality of the work of art, a “totality composed of different heterogeneous strata”, these erstwhile followers adopted the term ‘structure’, instead of ‘formalism’ (Wellek 67-8). The use of the word ‘structure’ in its specialized use, therefore, first took place at a conference of linguistics held at the Hague in 1928. Ironically, it was applied to
phonetics, and not really to the structure of languages. The innovators were three Russian linguists working outside Russia: Roman Jakobson, S. Karcevsky and N. Troubetskoy, whose base was Prague” (Sturrock 44). Collectively they were known as part of the Prague Linguistic Circle, a group of linguists who were gaining influence in Czechoslovakia.

It is important to remember here that Ferdinand de Saussure’s, *Course in General Linguistics*, complied by two of his students, from their lecture notes, was published in 1916, three years after his death. This publication was first translated into English in 1959. The idea that language could be “studied along two axes, one temporal and the other, in a manner of speaking, spatial” was no doubt, first proposed by Saussure (Sturrock 28). However, these facts can be used to extrapolate the idea that the migration of the European linguists like Jakobson, to the USA is paramount in the development of literary theory as part of the scholarship. And that the importance of Saussure is made aware first in their works. However, there are other influences and thinkers whose works are also important in the establishment of literary theory as I will be discussing soon.

**Transition from Formalism to Structuralism**

The preliminary endeavors of formalism laid the foundation of structuralist thought. As mentioned earlier, the Formalists strived to reduce the importance of content in literature, as a reaction to the earlier trend among critics of placing a great deal of importance upon literary content over the function of literary form. Formalist criticism in all its forms argued rigorously the artificiality of literature and literary production. This was revolutionary in its appeal, but while doing so, they seemed to have simply replaced the earlier central position of content with that of form. Believing that a “writers objective is to renovate literature formally, by some unprecedented use of ‘devices’, rather than to ‘say something that has not been said before”. With the later developments of formalism, the poetic work was being read as “a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices” (Sturrock 105).
The shift from formalism to structuralism was a gradual process. Much of it was the handiwork of Jakobson and the Prague School linguists. In their writing, an important proponent appeared which later distinguished them from the formalists. They believed that literary devices were in no way free floating concepts in the literary work and began to highlight the significance of the integration and dynamism of these "devices", in the overall piece of work, and therefore shifted their view to the overall structure of the literary text from the perspective of the function of the devices. This does not mean to say that the Formalist's believed that the literary devices were free floating agents, but they did not seem to be much concerned with the organicity of the system working upon the poetic work. Both integration and dynamism later developed into important concepts in structuralism (Sturrock 105).

The passage from Formalism to Structuralism enables literature to be reinserted into the societies in which it is produced, and by doing so, to re enter history. This may seem strange; but it was very much a mark of the Prague School that it set out to integrate literature with other arts and with cultural practices in general. Jakobson contested the extreme synchronism (as he saw it) of Saussure, on the grounds that a purely synchronic system lacked dynamism (Sturrock 105).

With the structuralist's, the idea of the content of the literary text becomes important again. This however should not be viewed as a return to representation. Theirs was a reaction to the excessive focus that the formalists relegated to the literary form, or the literary devices namely; that the sole function of the literary content was to justify literary form. The structuralist's were thus more liberal in their views. Their search was not primarily contained in the literariness of the literary text but rather in a search for the grammar or set rules that a text must follow or even reject to be classified as literature, "this can be achieved only by abstraction from actual texts" (Sturrock 111). Thus the system that literature follows, its function or process, in order to remain literary becomes their focus, rather than planting their gaze on the components of literature, like labels, designating literature. But like the Formalist, this too is an
attempt to objectify the methodology of literary scholarship, or striving to create a science of literature.

**Structuralism**

A structure is a model, that can either be tangible or abstract. The importance of a structure however, lies in not its individual parts but in the functioning or organization of its part in constituting the whole – the structure. It is therefore said to have an inner coherence a harmony where all the parts, however diverse, are oriented toward a singular whole. In other words, each part can have multiple tasks, many faucets and numerous possibilities but within the structure their possibilities are curtailed and are made to serve the inner coherence or goal which in tum becomes the structure. Therefore, the grammar or the relationship between the parts constituting the whole becomes more important than the individual elements, parts or devices. There is a sense of fixture in the idea of a structure and thus the word 'structuralism' is coined. The word also connotes a feeling that the structure is completed; nothing can be added or taken away from it without disrupting its structural unity, as if it constitutes a harmonious system, with a logic of its own. Here, one cannot help notice that the liberality of structuralism, which reacted against the orthodoxy of the Formalists, falls prey to an orthodoxy of its own. It is also at this point that structuralism is contested by its most careful readers: the poststructuralists.

With the rise of structuralism, questions and problems of language and articulation become a concern for epistemological and critical thought. In the structuralist model, with its foregrounding in the Saussurean binary paradigm of language: *langue* and *parole* and the reading of words as a singular unit consisting of a signifier and signified, a common and important thread is formed that becomes the resonant binding force of structuralist thought. This is mainly the concept of binary oppositions. Western scholarship is filled with binary sets, from the highly contested Platonic: body and soul to the hardly contested biblical: God and the Devil dichotomy, to the Neo-Classical: ‘ancient and moderns’ controversy and so on. Binary structures in the western context are therefore nothing new, at least in terms of
available binary sets. Nevertheless, in its application to literature, it would mean to study literary texts not as individual creations but as parts or elements that constitute an entire system of production. However, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that a structural rendition of a piece of literature would entail a representation of a system; and therefore, the earlier idea of representation which was ousted from literary scholarship by the Formalists was being brought back. This would nevertheless tantamount to a gross misunderstanding of both representation as well as structuralism.

Representation as I had mentioned earlier with its specialized use in literature, and its proximity to the ideas of imitation, universal truths, morality and the portrayal of human nature, constitutes an extra-real organicity outside the framework of the literary text. Where the text incorporates a didactic purpose or a moral foundation, the objective of the literary critic would be to extrapolate and judge these values. This would mean “To have pure representation (and) would be like having bits of reality actually in a ‘realistic’ picture” (Selden 346). With the structuralist’s, the text contains a logic, or organization of its own. Its function, or internal relations, or works, are viewed or related to other works and their function, almost technically in manner. Although there is always a subjective choice or judgment involved in the structuring of the structure, an outer moral purpose of any kind is deemed archaic and unwarranted. Thus structuralism as a methodology is not concerned with the representation of images but rather relations of devices within a literary structure and the relationship that these structures have with other structures. Here it is important to recall that structuralism is allied to phenomenology in its respective belief that anything outside of any possible human sensation, or “extra”-human structure, is impossible to fathom since in order to understand it, it must be brought into a human form that can be understood by human perception, inductively or deductively arrived.

With the arbitrary nature of language, words cannot be said to represent, but can only signify, this inevitably is a shift from the mode of representation to the idea of signification, and to me is the marker of literary theory. It is this idea of signification, and later with the poststructuralists, continuous signification through differentiation,
that separates the study of the 'theory of literature' from 'literary theory'. Structuralism cannot speak of representation because the tool, which is used to represent, namely language, is arbitrary and acts by differentiating words. Therefore structuralist methodology does not work by representing images and ideas but rather works through differentiation and signification. Similarly, literary texts acquire importance or coherence through differentiation and relations with other texts in signifying an organic structure—hence the term structuralism becomes paramount in the evolution of literary theory. The fact that structuralists are not concerned with interpretations as such but more with the competence which underlies interpretations is explained by Jonathan Culler. In his *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), he emphasizes this fact when he says "The (literary) work has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because these potential properties, latent in the object itself, are actualized by the theory of discourse applied in the act of reading" (Culler 114).

The transition from the works of the Prague Linguists to structuralism can be considered the nascent stage in the development of structuralism, where literary language is seen as an object of inquiry. Something worthy of study and that can be subjected to serious inquiry. This study of the technicalities of language in literature is a continuation of the works of the Russian Formalists. And like the Formalists, the structuralists were also tremendously inspired by the lectures of Ferdinand de Saussure (Sturrock 100).

There seems to be a gap of 20 years after which structuralism begins to rise in popularity. This can be seen to mark a second stage of structuralism. This is a post war event and is fueled by the writings of five dominant figures of structuralism. Namely, Claude Levi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian of ideas,Roland Barthes, a French Cultural critic and theorist of literature, Jacques Lacan, French Freudian psychoanalyst, and Louis Althusser, French political philosopher and theorist of Marxism. "These five men at no time constituted a school, being far too imperious and, in some cases, vain to endure any such surrender of their individuality. Their ideas however, unquestionably overlapped and came to mark an epoch in contemporary thought. The prestige they
enjoyed as individuals in a variety of disciplines was increased by the public's sense that together they were representative of the age, that [they] were living in Structuralist times’ (Sturrock 19).

To enter into the variations and details of these writers would be beyond the scope and relevance of my topic, nevertheless, here it is only important to highlight that with the advent of structuralism, literary theory, came in full bloom. The diverse areas from which each of these theorists operated and were also brought together on common grounds through a common belief in the system of language and the construction of human thought and knowledge through the structures of language is the foundation of structuralism. Although, theorists such as Foucault and even Barthes who are also read in their poststructuralist rendition of theory and thought, is an outcome of their grounding in structuralist thought. But my concern here is the movement and the impact that structuralism had in literary scholarship and in establishing a third discipline of literary scholarship, namely: literary theory.

In the area of literary scholarship, some of the structuralist had a much more powerful effect than others. For instance, the deep sensibility, and ingenious creativity of Lacan’s writings had a lasting effect in the area of literature and the study of language as a faculty of human reasoning. Lacan “explains that the idea that the unconscious is ‘structured’ and ‘as a language’ are entirely synonymous”, and that “The study of language itself, as the hypothetical template of all existing languages, is essentially a synchronic one because it is searching for the constants of language” (Sturrock 28). This structuralist notion emphasized by Lacanian psychoanalysis had tremendous implications upon the study of the literary text. The idea that our consciousness has no shape outside of language was not a new view, voiced by thinkers as far back as Nietzsche, but the idea that the subconscious is also linguistic in make up, becomes controversial and unprecedented.

With the works of Lacan and these other theorists, structuralism not only took a firm hold in linguistics but could be extended to social anthropology, historiography and semiotics, and even the theory of knowledge, all being connected by the paradigmatic
shift that was made towards language. It is here that the true multidisciplinary nature of human understanding appears. Although structuralism began as a methodology of knowledge and inquiry, it soon, like all methodologies, philosophies, took ideological or doctrinaire proportions. This is especially evident in the works of Claude Levi-Strauss, French social anthropologist, who believed that the 20th century intellectual inquiry can be best accommodated by a structuralist methodology. He would read systems of kinship and social taboos structured as a language, containing elements of meaning like the phonemes. He is considered to be the most pure of all structuralist thinkers (Sturrock 52).

Although structuralism was quite a novelty and like any popular idea, became fashionable during its "heydays", it is important to understand why it became so dominant. Structuralism appeared as a reaction at a time when atomist, empiricist and behaviorist criticism was dominating the literary scene. However, ideas have come and gone, knowledge is always in a process of change, but why do some ideas have remarkable effects than others. The answer, as I see it, is really not a mystery or a matter of chance, but a question of power, location, and history. Again, the next chapter will be devoted to this issue but I do not want to shy away from mentioning the effect that history has upon epistemology and certainly literary scholarship. It too constitutes part of the "life and times" of literary theory.

Literary structuralism, derives its impetus from the attempt to know how literature is made, read and understood. The attempt to learn some of the rules that can be followed or broken in the act of studying a literary text and to know the confines of language that is imposed on literature in its creation and internal logic can be a meaningful pursuit, and holds true for any field of scholarship. But, for those who feel that such a pursuit harms or obfuscates the pleasures of a "traditional" study of literature are functioning in an essentialist system of their own creation and not keeping the vast scope and deceptive nature of language in mind. They avoid the critical advancements of modern knowledge in the field of language, which should not be separated from literary scholarship. Literature if anything rests on the prestige of being a field tolerant in its scope and objective.
Structuralism is an all encompassing methodology, but like all methodologies, it too discriminates and leaves other possibilities out. Structuralism works by setting up systems of structures and focusing on the relations and correlations within those structures. Thus each and every device in a literary text, like plot, character, in poems, cadence and meters, are all connected within some logic leading to the teleology of a structure. Disparate ideas can be brought into this framework at will, to justify the structure. In fact, it is this aspect of structuralism that opens a possibility of interdisciplinary connections at the fundamental linguistic level of all expression. Therefore a specific reading of a text that restricts literary understanding within the framework of the text, like that propounded by the New Critics, is thought to be a truncated view of literary interpretation, based on a critics preference. In fact, even Marxist criticism or a psychoanalytical interpretation is considered to be isolating the very breadth and scope of the literary text to an extra-textual reality, rather than the text as a whole. Thus in structuralism, a Marxist psychoanalytical perspective would be deemed more fulfilling than just a Marxist or an isolated psychoanalytic interpretation of a literary text. The legacy of such reworking is apparent not only in postcolonialism and subaltern studies, but even the acceptance of Marxism, and its subsequent extension, at least to a certain limit that just falls short of outright rejection of Marxism. This 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 discussed in Chapter III).

Poststructuralism

While the formalists and structuralist’s were presenting their ideas, there were a great many who, while, appreciating the rigor of their methodology, however at times found it to be reductive, impoverish and limiting in scope. These theorist did not reject the structuralist argument per se but rather saw themselves as re-tailoring or
altering certain premises to accommodate a more complex and a larger encompassing view of cultural production.

For example, writers like Bakhtin and Medvedev pointed out as early as the mid nineteen thirties that the formalist’s (and structuralist too) rendition of literary texts as a series of meta-structures encompassing the past to present along with their inherent fear of meaning “with its not here and not now” is both sterile and unrealistic, “while destroying the fullness of its presence in the here and now...” (Sturrock 122). In other words, these scholars were expressing a view that the reading of a text produces multiple meaning and that each word can embody multiple layers of meaning in different time frames or structures, not to mention the immense possibility of a text. Although neither of these two philosophers can be considered to be poststructuralists in a strict sense, it is this very line of thought which lead to poststructuralism (Sturrock 122).

Poststructuralism does not come as a rupture to structuralism but rather, accepts the structural system of language, and further extends the ideas. It accomplishes this task through its reworking of certain fundamental inconsistencies that structuralism has ignored (Sturrock 123). The origins of poststructuralism seems quite normal when compared to its phenomenal rise in popularity. It is often said that French philosopher Jacques Derrida almost single-handedly created post-structuralism. In his paper, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” presented at a seminar at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, he introduced the new turn in structuralist methodology. He finds inconsistencies in structuralism and explains how the structuralist without questioning, accepted the idea of binaries and structures as a stable centre of reference. The main thrust of the paper of course was not just to expose the loopholes in the structuralist thinking. The essay raised questions about the metaphysical assumptions of western philosophy as a whole, a project much larger and much more controversial than a mere attack on a particular linguist methodology.

Derrida accuses the entire gamut of western philosophy to be based upon binaries, and the subsequent privileging of one pole of the binaries. Citing that, concepts like
speech, unity, centre, and presence have been the foundations of western thought, while systematically undermining the opposing poles: writing, fragmentation, periphery and absence, respectively. He cites a need to resist a one-dimensional thought process imposed by the entire discourse of western philosophy. He believes it has been unable to grasp the nature of language and meaning. In the works of Derrida the "principles laid down by Saussure serve the sweeping and skeptical purpose of undermining a prevailing trend and generally unconscious 'idealism', which asserts that language does not create meaning but reveals them, thereby implying that meaning pre-exist their expression" (Sturrock 123). For Derrida, such reasoning defies logic, as he believes, that there can be no thought or knowledge or meaning outside of language. He therefore accepts the structuralist model of the system of language; however, his interpretation of the inner workings of language is anything but structuralist to say the least.

Derrida accepts Saussure’s idea of the differential nature of the linguistic sign/word, that it has no intrinsic value of its own, apart from what is generated by its relation to the overall linguistic system. However, Derrida believed that Saussure was unable to grasp the complete significance of his own train of thought, not placing enough importance upon the idea of difference. The idea of difference within the system of language becomes the central notion upon which Derrida rests his theory and using this idea of difference, he shows how it can reset the metaphysics of presence. According to Derrida, the Metaphysics of Presence is the belief that presence precedes signification, which he finds nonsensical, and hierarchical. As an alternative, the process of deconstruction: an incessant play between the binaries, is presented in order to avoid any hierarchy and closure of meaning. According to Derrida, if the metaphysics of presence was a fact, then what is present would be immediate and an act of intuition and have no recourse to signs. Presence can only be signified through an act of language, and hence there can be no presence outside of the process of signification (Sturrock 123-4). The belief that there is an ultimate truth or reality, or word, becomes the foundation of human knowledge. He calls this belief, logocentrism
If the meaning conveyed by language is indeterminate, the inherent hierarchies of binary sets, which he terms the metaphysics of present, constructed through language and all other signifying processes should also be seen as indefinite. Derrida believed the structuralist treated systems of thought as if they were simultaneously present and not derived through the linguistic act. In order to illustrate this aspect of language, he redefines the French word *differance* to express the duality of the process of signification, where language works in an act of differing and deferring its meaning, making the signifying process indeterminate and therefore subject the act of language to the process of deconstruction. Therefore, Derrida sees the structuralist’s as betraying some of the crucial insights of Saussure by trying to locate the ‘centre’ of particular structures. According to Derrida, structures cannot have a centre by their very virtue of being structures, as it “makes no sense to speak of the ‘centre’ of a language or of any other such system” (Sturrock 132).

The aim of the poststructuralist reader is not to come up with an endless list of possible meanings rather, the aim is to locate the places where meaning becomes most rigid or hierarchical while undermining other possibilities. And to understand the text through a reworking of these other less dominant possibilities and see what aspects have to be suppressed in order for the dominant structure to surface, and the interrelations between these binary views. This process of deconstruction, to prohibit any process of closure to the meaning of the text tantamount to taking apart the structure of any existing text. Thus, the authority of the author as sole interpreter is lost under the pressure of such a methodology, as language is seen to be a deceptive medium and the meanings which are read may or may not correspond to the meanings that the author may have presumed to have placed in the text. Thus, the entire act of communication between the author and the reader is problematized.

Roland Barthes, a poststructuralist thinker, in *The Death of the Author* expresses that literature has always been under the usurpation, or the tyranny, of the Author. The author is no longer seen to be in charge of his creation, his own construction slips away from its own unified logic, set in motion to run its own course. Previously held views such as literature representing life or vice-versa, only become the mouthpiece
of the incessant play of language with no real origin of the message in the text. Therefore each subsequent interpretation becomes just another signification of the text in consideration, a continuous play between meaning and language, having no real hierarchical value or given any special treatment. The role of the author, the critic and subsequent readers, constitutes a continuous thread of never-ending signification of the text.

Even the use of the word *text* instead of the word *book* to refer to the written work becomes an alternative at the root of which lies the concept of incessant signification. The book is seen as an enclosed unified structure, restricted by interpretation or reducible to a manageable sum of meanings (or even a single, overall meaning) (Sturrock 135). The Text, on the contrary, is not enclosed but open to the dictates, deceptions of language, exuding multiple layers of meaning, like a virus multiplying, or disseminating with every cell it comes in contact with propagating a life of its own. Here language seems to become an autonomous agent, ironically having the upper hand agency vis-à-vis the interpreter.

With the text as a substitute for the book, limited by its covers or jacket, in the place of the author, poststructuralism substitutes the latter with the notion of the *subject*. The subject, finds its position within the text rather than the all knowing tyrannical author who remains outside of it and controls its workings, regulating meaning of the events and narrative. The subject therefore becomes a grammatical figure that sets the agency of language in motion. Thus at a certain level, there is a surrender to the text by both the author and subsequent readers and interpreters. By allowing the language to become an all pervasive entity, it lessens the rigidity of the selfhood of the reading subject, pacifying the preconceived notions of the subject but making the act of reading more active. This is no doubt one of the difficult propositions that poststructuralism presents its readers. It has been much contested and seen to take away the human quality of the literary text, as if the text never originated as a result of human agency. The text is a result of the human or more particularly the authorial will, however, there is no apparent way of understanding what this very authorial will may be from the poststructuralists' perspective (Sturrock 135-6). But this too
becomes quite difficult to fathom, especially for readers who have just learnt of the new approach. It causes a great deal of anxiety. However, the onus or importance that the postcolonial reader receives as a part of the tradeoff, the freedom to interpret, becomes quite liberating and appealing at the same time.

In such a case, all forms of written work are left to be used or reused and therefore reshaped in the very act of reading. Thus although the function of history, philosophy or say literature may very well vary in the consciousness of their authors, in its reception by readers, their approach toward it or the intention with which they approach it may also vary with the subject matter, but in the reading process there will always be a deferral process of meaning and therefore understanding which is never really grasped. In other words, a fact is in no way privileged as being a ‘fact’ than being fiction. All writing becomes inescapably metaphorical or ‘archi-writing’ due to the autonomous agency of language, fusing the distinction between the philosophical or any kind of writing (Sturrock 129). It is for taking such a stand that Derrida is accused of obfuscating the disciplinary boundaries between philosophy, literature and even history.

The latent irony however remains that while poststructuralism tries to disrupt any possibilities of creating hierarchies or centers of power, it places a great deal of emphasis on language much more than the structuralist’s or even their precursors the formalist. The structure and function of language becomes a very powerful entity, the control of all controls; ideas, knowledge, communication or all of human existence outside of the physical animal being, is accommodated within the command of the logic of language. Language is seen to be the over arching agent of all human knowledge attaining its own impetus irrespective of the intentions brought to it in its usage. But there can be no agency without the subject, but in contact with the medium of language the selfhood of the subject is reduced while language acquires critical agency. The text becomes a mere potential, but through the act of reading, generates multiple interpretations due to the metaphorical nature of language. It is as if the human subjects’ agency lies in the ability to observe language at play and rearranging the human subject position not only loses its authority but loses it to its
own use of language. Although it may seem to be a mystical understanding that language can acquire agency, which is meant to be a human possibility, it is bound within the system of language, and it is the very potential of language that rises above all other things, all other entities watch the play of language propagates. However, within the system of language, the human subject enjoys a considerable freedom and therefore agency at the level of sentence construction. "The (human) agent is required to form sentences according to recognized syntactical rules and out of words listed in the dictionaries of the language concerned; otherwise, the human agent is free to form sentences at will" (Sturrock 146).

However, "Derrida does not claim that his own words accede to a truth denied to the words of others. On the contrary, he accepts the conditions of language, and its metaphorical nature", and that the deconstructive interpretation offers to further his own texts (Sturrock 139). This however, becomes a weak point of poststructuralism, having the thesis turned upon itself. The condition of language and the process of deconstruction to liberate meaning begins to constitute a dominant truth of its own, even if the deconstructive process was to be deconstructed by itself. And thus undermining authority from a level of authority (Sturrock 140).

The never-ending possibilities of poststructuralism makes it a philosophy of Becoming rather than the structuralist notion of Being. The structure becomes a defining principle for the structuralist but for the poststructuralist, the structure that is in play, is open to endless possibilities. It becomes a more dynamic generator of meaning and possibilities. Thus going beyond the binary obsessions of both structuralism and the entire gamut of western intellectual discourse. At an alternative level, however, poststructuralism can be seen as the final completion of the structuralist project. Exposing gaps and fissures in the structuralist methodology and relating the overall project of structuralism to show how the restrictions of the sign and the linguistic system constrains and regulates our thought process.

The implication of such a reading is the inexhaustibility of the text and its perpetual openness to new critical responses. Any form of representation of truth, morality,
universality, humanism and other meta-narratives or defining principles become not only unwanted but, linguistically speaking, unattainable and bringing the interpretive process to a ridiculous halt. Whatever is achieved is momentary and only one possible interpretation among many possibilities. This naturally arms a reader with a great deal of interpretive power, who would have otherwise been disenchanted with any dominant interpretation, which may ignore or demean his or her own subjective position.

Poststructuralism of course had a tremendous impact in the field of literary scholarship, where logocentrism has had a lasting effect. It is also possible to contest logocentrism more radically in literature and not cause too many controversies than if it were to be used in the area of theology, history, philosophy or other social sciences. Such is the prestige of literature. The grandeur of the methodology of textual reading however cannot be said to have led to the phenomenal growth in the popularity of deconstruction and poststructuralism. It is very seldom that academic methodologies have such an impact to make a shift from the academic sphere to the private or rather popular sphere far out of the high walls of institutions. In fact its popularity outside academic circuits is probably one of the reasons why it continued to resonate within academic disciplines and that too, primarily within the Anglo-American institutional framework. In the next chapter, I would be arguing how, poststructuralism and deconstruction was seen as an alternative to Marxist intellectualism that was taking over academic institutions around the world and it was a methodology much more acceptable than the bleak existentialism, which was deemed a reaction to continental phenomena, or even the more conservative and limited empirical tradition prevailing in the Anglo-American circuits, just about the same time.

The identification of the arbitrariness of language has shaken the foundation of both identity and agency that were fundamental in the Platonic order. In all modern philosophical discourses, the notion of an objective agency has taken the greatest beating, when human agency was said to be ascribed by language. The meaning of the arbitrariness of language and the belief that language doesn’t explain everything that a speaker or a writer intends to explain, is in no way a new concept. But here it
has been used to shake the boundaries, both hegemonic and epistemological, of western academia. And this battle has been fought most viciously in the departments of English literature. In this battle, there have been takers on both sides. The arbitrary nature of the sign has first lead formalists and structuralists to contest certain ideas which have been sacrosanct such as the author, the novel, the book, or the unities; have all come under the scrutiny of literary theorists. As has the subject/object divide. It is based on the arbitrariness of the sign, that Derrida has contested the fundamental opposition of 'presence' and 'absence' in poststructuralism. The dichotomies which Derrida explains is not meant to subvert one for the other but to show how each side of a dichotomy contains the trace of the other, and thus absence is already a presence and vice-versa, where absence is a presence of absence; and presence is also the presence of an absence, in all its metaphysical textuality.

This paradigmatic shift into the system of language as a defining principle of human knowledge starting right form the formalist and reaching the poststructuralist is very markedly anti-humanist and an attempt to undermine western theories of enlightenment which was seen as the class embodiment of an ill-founded bourgeois subjectivism (Sturrock 145). There is a transfer of power to the literary agent, a human will, informed of the rules of language; and away from the author the reader. Authority is taken away from the author and given to the reader but the reader can hardly be said to have achieved anything extra authoritative or powerful, rather it is more like the ambiguity and confusion has been passed over from the author to the reader. The structuralist or even the poststructuralist subject can never be the superior, self-contained agent envisaged in earlier philosophies, "an essence independent by its nature from the system within which it is called on to function. Structuralism [and poststructuralism] conceives of the agent more modestly, as a function of the system" (Sturrock 145).
The New Critics

With the spread of language based literary analysis begun by the formalists, the earlier trend of criticism that consisted of a 200 year old tradition, was never usurped. It should not be thought that after the 1900's, theory as it was, before the paradigmatic shift that took place toward language, ceased to be, while all forms of criticism in literature began to practice theory based on language. However, the theory based on the advancements towards a system of language, given historical changes, and with new voices being heard – began to gain prominence in certain quarters since the formative years of the development of literary theory, beginning with the 1920s and reaching to the 1960s. This rise of literary theory can be traced back to the formalist and not really to the parallel critical tradition that was always part of literary scholarship – the study of literature as representation.

Although the formalist and their works are usually mentioned in reference to both structuralism and New Criticism, their influence on the latter theoretical modes is vastly underestimated. Although many may argue that New Criticism incidentally has similarities to formalism but nevertheless evolved on a way of its own is not a very convincing argument anymore. As I will show, there is evidence of a political choice in the reception of New Criticism as it was deemed to be an alternative to continental Marxist intellectualism. At a general glance, it may seem that structuralism and New Criticism had a common launch pad in Russian formalism but later followed their own political agenda, (which also influenced their epistemological methodology). In other words, the search for knowledge was not really an unbiased impartial search for 'Knowledge' but rather a search for a type of knowledge that would support a certain type of agenda. The new critics although aware of the advancements in language studies, they underplayed its influence in the study of literature.

The New Critics had a powerful influence upon shaping literary scholarship in the US. Although there are many differences and disagreements among opinions between them, their disregard for anything outside of the text is well know and at times hastily condemned. Although this view, condemnable in its strict sense – as it leads to a great deal of speculative readings, dominant readings, privileged readings, and at a
particular level, not critical enough, in the sense that poetry and literary production come to be seen as neutral, without any advocacy of identity, or agency or agenda, bereft of ideology, and history and only drenched in artistic value – it never really has been followed strictly even by most of the well known New Critics. Although the complete contextualization and historicisation of poetry becomes suspect to these critics who believe that any poem, in its totality, has its own meaning or meanings; they however were reacting to an earlier dominant trend, namely: impressionistic, vaguely romantic, and sentimental appreciation, and readings in which much of the life and times of a poet and didactic views are seen to culminate into an artistic creation. Wellek calls this a reaction against the “critical relativism” of the time, the same empiricism that first led the formalist and later the structuralist to react against its overwhelming positivism. And also against the “anarchy of values to which nineteenth century historicism had led, and in part a new belief in a hierarchy of absolute values, a revival of classicism” (Wellek 46). The alternative idea held by these critics and even traditionalists like T.S. Elliot was that the entire body of poetic knowledge from Homer to the (then) present constituted a “simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (Wellek 46). Thus, the entire gamut of poetry and literature was deemed a complete ever growing body of timeless artistic expression. An expression independent of history, biography and ideology, or Anthropology, psychoanalysis or Marxism, with the view to study literature as an “aesthetic fact” (Wellek 308).

The question that arises is then who has the authority to penetrate this expression and add to its growth? Who decides, who stays and who goes? This naturally charts out an important role of the critic as a privileged judge of literary representation and value. New Critics are in no way literary theorists, (in my definition, even though they may have a logic or theory of their own, that would only constitute a ‘theory of literature’). It is this trend that had a parallel and dominant position in among British and American classrooms for many years. In fact the new trend which rose with the 1980s in literary scholarship probably was a reaction to the New Critics and their methodology. Wellek points out a fundamental problem in such reasoning namely that this simultaneous order of the body of artistic expression totally ignores the process of poetic evolution and of course historiography, while setting up their
timeless universal standards of rationality and morality. The advances made in the area of language studies remains unexplored by these critics (Wellek 360).

In other words, even the study of poetic movements such as the Romanticism or Neoclassical movements ought to raise questions in the New Critics' line of thought. This search for meaning and a belief in close analysis to bring forth valid, judgments of value keep the New Critics in a search for literary representation. Thus with the rise of the formalist and other structuralist schools, the search for representation and meaning and therefore criticism was never given up. This search for representation, loses its dominance in American academic circles in the years to come.

The New Critics, argued "that a literary work of art is a verbal structure of a certain coherence and wholeness, and that literary study had often become completely irrelevant to this total meaning, that it had moved all too often into external information about biography, social conditions, historical backgrounds, etc" (Wellek 7). However, according to Wellek, this is not a dismissal of the relevance of historical information in view of poetic interpretation (Wellek 7). Wellek sites the example of Cleanth Brooks' criticism of Marvell's *Horatian Ode* where he tries to separate the poems meaning from the poets attitude to Cromwell and Charles I. "He argues "that the critic needs the help of the historian -- all the help he can get," but insists that "the poem has to be read as a poem -- that what it 'says' is a question for the critic to answer, and that no amount of historical evidence as such can finally determine what the poem says" (in Wellek 7). Of course, to over emphasize history at the cost of evaluating the work of art is also as reductive as the New Critical stance.

However, Wellek feels that a middle path of judging both the historical context as well as the literary piece would not tantamount to "extreme relativism" but rather the critics task is to pass his own judgment based on how much of each he or she believes the piece of work provides (Wellek 12). Thus the fluidity and elasticity of choice or judgment should not be curtailed by artificial methods imposed by the critic upon himself -- and according to Wellek will change along with changes in history. The stand taken by Wellek here, much more than any other position, is one of moderation. At the level of theory, this judgment becomes a point of suspect, and Wellek feels the
role of theory enters at this point. Criticism of any kind, has always lost its audience, each time it takes a solid side, and steps outside the path of moderation, or a tolerant acceptance of multiple positions. The next logical question to be asked is, whether a strong adherence to moderation, is not also an extreme position? However, this position has not really been taken by too many critics to begin with, for it too becomes a popular stand point, and if taken, can only be condemned for being a confused position. Providing clarity seems to be the role of the critic, quite like that of an advocate! However at times a confused position seems to be the most complete in knowledge and practice.

The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School of Criticism and its influence on literary scholarship is also exceptional especially in the development of literary theory. Although the Frankfurt school advanced a social theory, and its influence may not seem as dominant as the role poststructuralism played, the overall development that took place in the departments of literature in terms of identity studies, found great impetus in this social theory.

The Marxist anti imperialist/capitalist trend, as already discussed, not only had a monumental effect in the polarization of the world economic system, but its ideology had naturally penetrated into academic discourse that it seemed to have bifurcated even the theory of knowledge. I have already noted that this was encapsulated in the layers and the fissures and ruptures of the formation of literary theory and subsequently, later percolating in the theory wars. Leftist ideology probably penetrated theory with a most striking vigor with the Frankfurt school, even much more than the initial leftist trend of the formalists. Their influence on American academia and especially the departments of English literature and subsequently literary scholarship around the world, can be easily established.
The Frankfurt School of German social theory began as a centre for Marxist studies. Initially known as the Institute of Social Research, officially established on the 3rd of February 1923 by a decree of the Ministry of Education, Germany, and affiliated to the University of Frankfurt. The actual school however only developed after the Institute was forced to leave Frankfurt. And the term itself began to be used only after WWII, when some of the proponents of the institute began to return to Germany starting with the 1950s, from the US (Bottomore 11).

The school began as primarily a Marxist school of thought. However, at no point of time did the thinkers of the school follow a particular or stringent Marxist mode of thought. Much later, and ironically, some of the greatest thinkers began to break out of its Marxisms molds, as many of the social theorists found themselves rejecting much of the foundational tenants of Marxism. The school was spearheaded by the works of Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno and Marcuse and later Jurgen Habermas.

The mounting irrationality of social and cultural values, and their reflection in the ideas of positivism and 'scientism' which dominated the academic discourse of the European continent at the time, to which even the Prague linguists were reacting to at relatively the same period – the 1930’s, was also the dominant concern of the Frankfurt School theorists. However again, these ideas like the theories of the structuralists only became prevalent in the Anglo-American academic discourse only during the 1960’s (I will return to this point later in the next chapter).

The empirical aspect of knowledge that it can only be based on sense experience was strongly contested by these theorist. In its place, they argued the objectivity and freedom advance by the political and social role in the methods of social sciences (Mautner 438). In their works, they reassessed the domination exhorted by science and technological rationality. They considered this to be a characteristic of late capitalism, and thus arguing against the foundations of capitalist ideology. They strived to create an alternative methodology of social theory (Bottomore 28). However, after finding themselves in exile in the heart of a capitalist society, the USA, during the late 1930’s, there was a tremendous shift in their overall anti-
capitalist project. This does not mean they embraced capitalism, or contradicted their earlier views, but it seemed to have altered the force of their initial anti-capitalist zeal. They later concerned themselves with psychoanalysis and aesthetic theory, and a criticism of ideology as the major impediment against social emancipation. They also relegated their studies to areas of popular culture, mass media and even the dominations and inefficiencies of bureaucracy and technocracy.

In the initial years, the school centered its position on viewing Marxism as a social science. Its first director Carl Grunberg, an economic and social historian, in his inaugural speech in 1924 argued that "the materialist conception of history neither is, nor aims to be a philosophical system ... its object is not abstractions, but the given concrete world in its process of development and change" (in, Bottomore 12). By the early 1930s, however, many of the theorists found themselves in exile in North America, which continued for most of them till the 1950s. These years have been marked by a neo-Hegelian trend of critical theory and was spearheaded by Horkheimer who later took over the directorship of the school from Grunberg. It is said that the most important aspect about his appointment is that during his years as director, the emphasis on economics was replaced with an emphasis on history and philosophy and much later, even an influence of psychoanalysis had captivated the school by some of it younger and greatest thinkers like Marcuse and Adorno. Their main philosophical target seemed to be the bourgeois cultural industry or the deception of the enlightenment.

By the 1950s, the institute had begun to cast an influence in Germany and other parts of Europe with its new areas in social thought. After the mid 1950's its influence was felt in many American institutes as well. By the 1960's the school had achieved its peak in terms of intellectual and political influence, given the rise of student movements as well as nationalist movements around the world. (Bottomore 13).

Marxist theory has had constant claims upon the style of thought and the situation of a social group, both of which are deemed connected (Bottomore 15). Horkheimer claimed that "neo-romantic metaphysics and radical positivism alike have their roots
in the present sad state of the middleclass' and again, 'the entire system of modern empiricism belongs to the passing world of liberalism' (Bottomore 16). Although this also points to the local situation of a country or place, these early theorists may have underestimated the hegemonic importance of location that influences philosophical thought. In other words, continental Europe has always been an important place for American ideas. But America itself becomes a prime location for the repackaging of these ideas and trends along with its own alterations. In fact, there is a game of Chinese Whisper that goes on in literary theory and even philosophy as it changes continents, in which it also seems to be changing in meaning. To call this change, as information lost in translation would be an oversimplification. As ideas are contested and pursued with, not a personal or even just an epistemic agenda but, a nationalist agenda. Somewhat like the way in which English literature was imposed upon by the British to make better subjects out of the Indians. In fact catering to demand and popularity (in publishing and printing) as opposed to a sincere pursuit of knowledge has never been achieved since Socrates and Plato!

The radical changes that take place in the Frankfurt School intellectuals becomes evident in the work of one of their most well known thinkers, Theodore Adorno. His principle interest was not in the Marxist trend of history or even philosophy but with the cultural field and more specifically with music and psychoanalysis and aesthetic theory. His work marks a profound influence by the writings of Walter Benjamin. (Bottomore 18). In his writings, Adorno steered away from the neo-Hegelian idea of a dialectical social theory to a what he termed ‘negative dialectics’ or a systematized criticism of all philosophical treaties and social theories “a form of relativism or skepticism, which denies the possibility of any absolute starting point …” (Bottomore 18). In his theories, he was very much distanced from other thinkers of his school, namely Marcuse and Horkheimer, who based the Hegelian concept of reason to formulate a more positive social theory, and more closer to the Marxist social theory.

However, by the 1950’s most of the Frankfurt School Marxist were abandoning the notion of the “revolutionary potential of the working class”. Adorno who went further “seems never to have given any serious attention to Marx’s economic analysis
or his theory of class, and he rejected entirely the idea of a theory of history, or 'science of history', which is one of the fundamental elements in Marx's thought" (Bottomore 18). In their work, there grew a particular interest in the notion of anti-Semitism, which was an overriding concern among academics in America and the European continent, right after the Second World War. This also became a concern for the Frankfurt school during the last years of their exile, as the analysis and criticism of 'irrational' beliefs and attitudes in modern society, was manifest especially in the form of anti-Semitism (Bottomore 23). And this seemed to have constituted the new purposes, or the new driving force of the School.

In fact, Adorno's shift to a theory of music and aesthetics may have been an attempt to find an area or an epistemological search for a less racially charged social theory. It was probably this quasi-Marxism bordering at ignoring a Marxist line of thought that made him much more influential and appealing to the Anglo-American academic circuits. In other words, like elsewhere as I have tried to show, the real concerns of epistemology are charged and molded by political thought and historical events. The reception and acceptability and certainly popularity of a theory seems to rely tremendously upon the immediate questions it answers or exposes. However, when the concerns of a theory are uprooted from the place of their origins to a distant socio-historical context, the theory trembles and its reception comes under suspect, and at times forced upon by hegemonic forces within the academia: namely, publication space in journals, topics of seminars and corporate finances.

In the 1960s with the rise of new radical movements, like the ethnic Civil Rights movement in the USA and nationalist movements in Africa, Latin-America and peasant revolts and student riots in various parts of the developing world, the Frankfurt School theorists saw in these forces the potential for a worldwide social revolution. These were seen as the new potential revolutionary forces quite contrary to the workers revolutionary zeal as projected in traditional Marxism.

The Frankfurt School theorists believed that dissent was a necessity for social reform, and that in the Twentieth Century, any expectation of a workers revolt was a
possibility so remote that it would be meaningless to construct a social theory around a traditional Marxist view. In the 1960’s the world scenario provided them with the optimistic view of pursuing their social theory. For example, Marcuse who had stayed back in the USA, when most of the other theorists re-congregated back in Germany, he “found some ground for hope in the ‘revolt of the youth’ (Bottomore 46). It was in his theories that the leaders of the student’s unrest of the late 1960s found great impetus and social justification, awareness and the need for social change.

Thus, the critique of modern culture and its oppressive and exploitative mechanism becomes the object of inquiry and the need to counter these forces of establishment and oppression becomes the teleology of their methodology. In fact ‘counter culture’ becomes part of the methodology to bring about social change. But at the theoretical level, these thinkers, especially Marcuse and Adorno stressed on the alienation and reification of the subject. Thus a defense of the subjectivity: an individual’s freedom and choice, is pitted against the objectivity of the established law and order, which is seen to govern the historical process. It is understandable then, that in the volatile times of the 1960s especially in the USA, such theories were not only read but attained a cult following among students and other groups which projected collective dissent against the main establishment.

Domination itself is a seed of dissent and reason for reaction and further dissent. Of course, these movements also found inspiration in other Marxist doctrines like Maoism, the Cuban revolution and other nationalist movements around the world (Bottomore 49). The Frankfurt School, therefore, was only one current of thought, although that fact that its theories were less radical and propagated less violence than the social movements of China and Cuba, probably made it more accessible and acceptable to certain American academic circles who also felt that the capitalist concentration of material wealth as opposed to an overall well being as the greatest indicator of success, was made at the cost of culture and values (Mautner 207).

The death of Adorno and Horkheimer and the decline of the radical student movements in the early 1970’s, marks the end of a major phase in the history of the
Frankfurt School. It was during this time that the ideals of the school was furthest from its initial Marxist ideals (Bottomore 55). However, it was at this time that the popularity of theory was well on the rise, and was being contested more rigorously in the classrooms of not just sociology or history departments but also in English departments around the world. "... The aim of critical theory becomes manifest as the transformation of society and human emancipation. This attempt to synthesized knowledge and purpose, theoretical and poetical reason, became and remained a fundamental philosophical position of the Frankfurt School, and the ground of its criticism of the positivist separation of 'fact' and 'value'" (Bottomore 29). Adorno theories of aesthetics and psychoanalysis, may not have been coupled with the poststructuralist trend which was dominant in the Anglo-American English department but were nevertheless viewed as an alternative trend to the linguistic theories and more in tune with cultural criticism, which seems to connect to identity studies, which became a dominant trend in the 1990s. Of course, by the 1980's literary theory is completely institutionalize in the curriculum of English departments in American universities and its popularity begins to spread around the world.

In the works of Jurgen Habermas, a second generation Frankfurt School theorist, the importance of language can be noted. The influence of the structuralist and poststructuralist is seen to penetrate the School through his works. In a lecture given to the members of the school in 1965, he argued that 'what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language'" (Bottomore 59).

The Frankfurt School was tremendously influenced in its social theory by its immediate response to cultural events, concepts of historical methodology and sociopolitical upheavals of their present day. Ideas of aesthetics, nationalism, and socialism to anti-Semitism, created a trend that would allow the academic to engage themselves with society at a critical and theoretical level, much deeper than that, at the journalistic level and more topically relevant than an epistemological analysis. It is this trend which seems to be followed in the turn that literary scholarship takes in the 1990s, especially with reference to identity studies. With literary studies, the rigors of the linguistic analysis of text and the interpretation of the text all seem to
come together, or at least become reservoirs of resource tapped by the literary critic, who now becomes more of a cultural critic than ever before.

The Dictatorship of Theory

It was a culmination of these various trends in language, criticism, social theory that affected the path of literary theory and gave it a dominant role in the sphere of literary scholarship. There were of course many other trends, which influenced in turn, the trends that I had discussed. However, to delineate each and every minor and major epistemological influence and all other possibilities would be close to impossible in this work. One of my concerns in this project has been to show the extra-epistemological influences in the culmination of theory, and its subsequent establishment in literary scholarship and its international enterprise (both of which I am yet to make adequate comment upon). The dominance of theory and its influence in departments of English today, I believe were influenced by certain trends much more than others. It is these dominant trends that I have tried to delineate. But, yes, there are others which I have not made any account of. For example, the Foucauldian new historicism, intertextuality and disciples of Lacan, like Kristeva, the early waves of feminism, the Chicago School and many others of the like. As for the former three and their class, I feel these entered the discourse of literary scholarship and specifically constituted the area of theory through the paths created by the developments that I already discussed. As for the latter, there were many specialized groups which may have detached themselves from larger groups of thought through a narrowing down of certain aspects of their methodology, but their thoughts may be seen as a tributary out flow, from a common body of thought.

The entire gamut of literary theory comes to rest on the concept of the arbitrary nature of language, and the idea that knowledge can only be understood in terms of language and that it filters through the inadequacies of language and therefore is always restructured or even tainted, by the inadequacies of language. It is this shift from representation to signification that marks the divide between a theory of literature and literary theory. The history of literature continues to grow, literary theory is a
moment in this history, its production may well have subsided for now but this
doesn't mean an end. For example, the end of Shakespeare may be marked with the
death of Shakespeare, but Shakespearean plays continue to play. Mortality is a
human limitation, and to perceive things in terms of life and death maybe part of the
human rationale. Popularity of ideas is a matter of choice and selection, and should
not be personified in terms of birth and death, but rather periods of growth, expansion
and retraction, after a point of culmination much like the concept of a dynamic
universe rather than the model of a static universe.

Most theorists agree that the year 1966 "relevant for the reception of Structuralism in
America" ushered in the theoretical enterprise of literary theory in the discipline of
literary scholarship (Sturrock 4). It therefore had a particular, if not a specific, point,
but a process of initiation, at a certain geographical location and within a certain
historical context. It rested upon a paradigmatic study of language, not in terms of
grammar and philology — part of the longer tradition of language studies, but as
mentioned earlier in this work, based on the principle that language is an arbitrary
system of signs, a concept formulated in a study made approximately 66 years earlier.
Although some may feel that, it would be more relevant to use this earlier date as the
very beginning of the theoretical enterprise, I wrote earlier in this chapter that this
would be a problematic selection for two reasons. First, that the conceiving of an idea
and secondly its spread and reception are two separate entities, and not a single affair.
Seemingly external aspects (non-epistemological) affect both the formulation of an
idea or even an event, and also affects the spread and reception of the same idea,
whether the idea survives or perishes depends on these factors. Any informed reading
of history is bound to be checkered with a multitude of new ideas which "never made
it" to the pages of history (a meta-historical reading of history if one may accept).
This is not to say that such perished theories lacked merit, or simply to say the world
wasn't ready for them. The preparation of the world, in receiving an idea, and
subsequently spreading the idea, contains a theory, a politics, a history and an
epistemology in itself. Therefore to accept the conception of an idea as the beginning,
(for the sake of argument, it can be said, that a theorist may have had the idea for
many years but published it at a later date. Or the ideas were half baked and were
worked upon by others in a collective effort, or that it was a grand theory but did not have any takers or disciples), is to decontextualize an idea and miss the politics and relevance of the ambience that may have influenced it, not to mention the preparedness or the readiness. The reason for the selection of the year 1966 as the point of literary reception, is because, in the case of literary theory, it is in this year that it enters its grand metropolitan location, from which it generates, expands and is exported throughout the English departments of the world as part and parcel of the literary enterprise. It is literally an enterprise with all its market driven trimmings. And again, it is not just the philosophical premises contained in theory which is important but also the politics, its location, export and reception.

In this chapter, I have tried to highlight the dominant trends and ideas that have formulated the literary enterprise. The location, export and reception of literary theory as part of literary scholarship will be the concern of my next chapter. The dominance of theory that had taken place in the 70s and 80s is an important question that must be raised. Theory can be seen and should be seen as only a portion of our discipline. It is very important but it cannot alone embody the vastness of literary studies. It can argue, but it can never emote the human expressions embodied in a literary text. In fact its purpose is anything other than this. Then why such a dominance or can it be seen as a dominating factor?

Was the theoretical enterprise a coup de ta of literature, a usurper of literature, or was it a reformist in literary tradition a reformation or a restoration. Was literature deficient in any way to contain the changes that were taking place around the world? The hegemony of the novel which won over epic poetry (Radice 7) together were they both deficient in dealing with the changes? Was theory a response to the age of ideology while leading to the reactionary poetry of Pablo Naruda or prison cell novels, and therefore was deemed a necessity and hailed as a reformation movement, something that we believed brings change, or was it a platform to resist? And if so, when did this theory become a dictatorial regiment, that has out shone its own light and now dims. Was it capable of providing that cornucopian platform that literature
so democratically provides, or was thought to provide, or did it lapse into that monochrome of totalitarian camouflage fatigue?

Literary theory was never seen as a substitute to literature. Rather a romantic notion was held that it sharpened the rusty edges of literature (at least thought to be by some theorists) and gave it a luster, a varnish/polish (added the frills!). The alternative perspective may have been that it was a rude coup upon the "Caliphate of literature", that have led many a student (or followers) astray, away from the literary text — the artistic expression. Literature as a discipline contains (discussions of) morality, ethics, religion, imagination, emotions, senses, pride power, good and evil. In other words, all things that human perception allows to perceive, and even upon perception itself. Was there a need for literary theory in at least literary studies where literature itself can provide an adequate platform for theory?

Theory was too early seen to be that which could remark, but not contain all these things, and much more, and could also remark upon itself. It was thought to weed out discrimination and discrepancies in literature, history and criticism. In other words, it takes its own perception to task. Something that literature could also do but was recognized that literature could do so only after literary theory came along!

It is like creating an image through an auditory perception, even if such image would be a clear image in the mind, which as ridiculous as it may sound, boils down to "seeing" with your ears (which creates an image in your head — like a bat). It would still be the requirement of sight (ocular perception) to confirm it. But confirming it with the eyes is also creating an image in the mind). Since we trust the eyes more to give us the perception of images, which is a perception or rather a privileged perception of sight in itself. The reverse can also be true as the experience of a deaf person composing music (I have Mozart in mind). In other words, theory has been a way of taking the "image" created by sound (as in literature) and confirming it with sight (theory) or so the theorist may like to believe. In other words, according to theorists, theory confirmed what literature was already doing and at many times was remarkably good at. Then why was literary theory necessary? Was it "always
already" redundant? Rather its existence in this case explains its necessity. It may be possible to see theory as a reaction to an earlier age, just like other literary trends like Neo-classicism, Romanticism, modernism, existentialism and so on, and not just as an epistemological and rationalistic study of epic proportions. The next chapter will take a closer look at these problems from the perspectives of the theory wars and especially the detractors of theory. These detractors constitute an important part in the “life and times” of theory in English literary scholarship.

The readings of literature and canon formation and epistemology have been much influenced and directed by the guiding principles of the spirit of the age rather than the discoveries of knowledge per se. This seems to be true especially when keeping the evolution of English studies and the advent of literary theory in English curricula in mind. For much time until the 1960’s Russian Formalism seemed to have disappeared under the forces of the Marxist intellectual currents that dominated the European intellectual arena, however, their influence echoes well into the 1960’s.

The forty years between the 1920’s and the 1960’s had an unprecedented influence in the history of literary scholarship. These four decades are marked by what I prefer to call ‘the intellectual displacement’, where many European intellectuals who had been influenced by the politics, thoughts and ground realities of Europe; collecting their ideas and crossed over the Atlantic to the USA. Their ideas, like many things continental (European), were embraced by a young group of radical students and teachers in American institutions, who may have been waiting for a recharge and a whiff of fresh air.