CHAPTER 2

CHANGING THE TOPIC:
POSTSTRUCTURALISM, THE HUMANITIES, ENGLISH STUDIES

It is just not the case that one need adopt one's opponents' vocabulary or method or style in order to defeat him. Hobbes did not have theological arguments against Dante's world-picture; Kant had only a very bad scientific argument for the phenomenal character of science; Nietzsche and James did not have epistemological arguments for pragmatism. Each of these thinkers presented us with a new form of intellectual life, and asked us to compare its advantages with the old.

--Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism

The problem with literary theory is that it can neither beat nor join the dominant ideologies of late industrial capitalism. Liberal humanism seeks to oppose or at least modify such ideologies with its distaste for the technocratic and its nurturing of spiritual wholeness in a hostile world; certain brands of formalism and structuralism try to take over the technocratic rationality of such a society and thus incorporate themselves into it.

--Terry Eagleton Literary Theory: An Introduction

Richard Rorty tells us that new philosophical paradigms come into existence not as a result of revolutionary geniuses painstakingly critiquing and refuting the theories of their eminent predecessors, but by people `finding new vocabularies,' by another generation of theorists `changing the topic' so that new and interesting kinds of knowledge are illuminated. Something like this appears to have happened with English studies. The topic has been changed, and a new object of opposition has been set up. What the topic was, and what it was changed to, is suggested by Eagleton's remarks.

It is difficult, in discussing poststructuralism, to lay out precisely what one means by the term: in fact the practice of the
poststructuralists would seem to encourage ambiguity. The writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault are usually considered to be quite safely within the boundaries of anyone's definition, however, and this is as good a starting point as any. I shall use the term poststructuralism to refer to a cluster of concepts and attitudes that seem to be central to these writings: among these being a hostility towards the human subject, especially as it is conceived as autonomous; a belief that language constitutes meaning; a scepticism about the possibility of arriving at determinate meanings in relation to texts; and a suspicion of metanarratives and universals, especially those associated with 'progress.'

Critiques of poststructuralist writings have, by and large, emphasised either the internal incoherence of these writings (Habermas, Peter Dews, Gillian Rose, Stanley Rosen, John Searle) or their politically reactionary tendency (Habermas again, Perry Anderson, Edward Said).¹ In this chapter, I want to draw attention to an aspect of poststructuralist thought which has not, as far as I can make out, received much attention: the (on the whole successful) attempt to shift the focus of the humanities away from instrumental rationality and disenchantment, and towards unrestrained individual freedom.²

Poststructuralism has "changed the topic" (my shorthand for Rorty's thesis about how 'strong textualists' or those who practice revolutionary science, in Thomas Kuhn's sense of the term, bring about paradigm shifts); and largely because of the
very success with which the topic has been changed, it is more than a little difficult to hark back to the earlier topic. In order to do so, some backtracking in terms of disciplinary histories is called for.

English Studies as Part of the Humanities

In the last twenty or so years, an interesting new series of studies, almost a new genre, has made its way, if not quite into mainstream English studies, at any rate into secondary reading lists in many English departments: adversarial histories of English studies. Usually written from an avowedly Marxist ideological position, these studies analyse the development of English studies in their New Critical or Leavisite manifestations in terms of class interest, the maintenance of elites, the subordination of working class groups, or women, or colonized subjects, and the masking of ideologies by claims of neutrality or of aspirations to excellence. Francis Mulhern and Chris Baldick have written full length studies on what can roughly be called the ideology of the early and influential teachers of English; Raymond Williams, Perry Anderson and Terry Eagleton have written shorter accounts.3

All these studies are interesting and informative, and probably offer a much needed counterweight to the influence of earlier histories such as those by D.J. Palmer and F.R. Leavis himself.4 Francis Mulhern's _Thr. Moment of Scrutiny_ is a scrupulously fair account of the efforts of the Scrutiny group
around F.R. Leavis to build up English as a "discipline of intelligence" in the university; and Perry Anderson's explanation of the rise of English studies, though schematic, is arguably the best account we have of the growth of English, placed as it is in the context of the political, social and intellectual climate of the period studied. I shall concentrate, in this chapter, on Anderson's analysis, both because of its range and suggestiveness, and because it comes closest to placing English in the framework of the characteristic set of interests of the humanities, my main concern in this chapter. I say "comes closest" advisedly; for one of the most surprising things about these otherwise scholarly and wide ranging analyses is the omission of any discussion of English as a specifically humanities subject, the humanities being understood as a historically developing orientation towards modernity.

Any discussion of the humanities in the university must begin with the understanding that the humanities are not what they used to be. The older, classical humanities were constituted largely by the study of "grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy, studied in the language and literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans" (Encyclopaedia 1180). Rhetoric was particularly important. "[T]he pursuit of eloquence (eloquentia) was a major task for the educated scholar and writer and ... was inseparable from the pursuit of wisdom (sapientia)" (Kristeller 122–23); and "[f]or Romans like Cicero and Quintilian, the humanities were those arts and subject matters which are best
suited to the formation of the orator, who was, for them, the virtuous and wise man par excellence" (Crane 5). The modern humanities, to put it briefly, and perhaps controversially, constitute themselves in opposition to the claims of science (and to those of the social sciences, insofar as these explicitly model themselves on the natural sciences). The 1981 Encyclopaedia Britannica entry on the Humanities, after some uneasy but symptomatic waffling between the pragmatic "the humanities is a term that refers to one of the administrative divisions of the college....not included within the divisions of the natural sciences and the social sciences" and the more mystical "[t]he humanities are considered to constitute a distinct kind of knowledge that is humanistic ...concerned with human values and expressions of the spirit of man (1179)," finally settles down to a more substantive definition:

The first modern attempts at elaborating a general theory of the humanities are seen in the efforts of certain 19th century German philosophers to stake out and defend certain areas of knowledge as lying outside of, and beyond, the reach of the natural sciences. (1180)

The article goes on to distinguish four types of definitions of the humanities in the twentieth century. Each of the four types represents a distinctive approach to the humanities and provides a developed account and defense of them as
constituting a unified field of study distinct from both the natural and the social sciences. On one proposition all four theories are in basic agreement, viz., that the humanities form an important and valid area of knowledge distinct from that of the sciences. (1180)

There are, of course, other definitions of the humanities; and many humanists would recoil from a description that is largely cast in negative or defensive terms. Keeping in mind caveats regarding such reductiveness, we still have to accept that any attempt to define the sphere and scope of the modern humanities has to begin by registering the existence of their great Other in the university, the natural sciences.

Perry Anderson's "Components of the National Culture" is a dazzling demonstration of the author's range and analytical skills. Some of the power of the writing comes from the tone: even in opposition, Anderson can barely conceal his awe at the grip conservatism has on the British psyche. The tension between his political goals (the article begins and ends with references to an anticipated student movement) and his grim awareness of the strength of the conservative opposition runs through the analysis. Beginning by noting the symptomatic absence of classical sociology in Britain—in this respect unique among the larger powers of Europe—Anderson uncovers the bland, anti-intellectual, parochial ethos of one academic discipline after another: philosophy, history, political theory, economics,
psychology, aesthetics. In all of these a native status-quoism has routed `general ideas' and any form of radical thought. An army of conservative emigres—a white emigration—inundated Britain in the 1920s and '30s, attracted to Britain because of its unparalleled success in holding revolution at bay, but also in their turn helping to maintain conservatism by their ideological support (Anderson mentions Wittgenstein, Popper, Berlin, Gombrich and Namier). The absence of sociology in any significant form is explained as resulting from the absence of Marxism as a political force to reckon with; sociology, with its emphasis on the primacy of ideas, having come into existence largely as a response to the materialism of Marxism ("Components" 52-56).

The most interesting part of Anderson's analysis has to do with his idea of `the absent centre', the `totality':

Britain, then, may be defined as the European power which--uniquely--never produced either a classical sociology or a national Marxism. British culture was consequently characterized by an absent centre. For both historical materialism and classical sociology, in their different variants, were totalizing enterprises--attempts to capture the `structure of structures', the articulation of the social whole itself.... From the outset, the British bourgeoisie forwent any large questioning of society as a whole. A deep, instinctive aversion to the very category of the totality came to
mark its characteristic outlook. ("Components" 56-57)

But this totality, like the repressed, returns, `in abnormal or paradoxical habitats'; in this case, in the disciplines of anthropology and literary criticism. Anderson writes:

The second displaced home of the totality was to be literary criticism. Here no expatriate influence ever became dominant. Leavis commanded his subject within his own generation. With him, English literary criticism conceived the ambition to become the vaulting centre of `humane studies and of the university'. English was `the chief of the humanities'.

("Components" 96)

The analysis, so far, has been consistently brilliant. The hypothesis about literary criticism's filling 'the vacuum at the centre of the culture' is convincing; it explains the continuing influence of Leavis's thought not only in Britain but in the Anglophone world in general, and, to some degree, in the erstwhile colonies. But why literary criticism? Anderson has good arguments for anthropology being the `home of the totality'; when it comes to English, at the most crucial part of his analysis, he is forced to fall back on paradox: "Driven out of any obvious habitats, the notion of the totality found refuge in the least expected of studies" (97). Anderson, relentlessly pointing to the weaknesses of disciplines that refuse dialectical materialism, sensitive to the political implications of later Wittgensteinian philosophy, perceptively analysing Popper's hysterical hatred of
Hegel, aware as few have been before him of the way in which a traditional structure of thinking can repel new thought like an organism repelling alien particles, suddenly offers us a paradox in lieu of an explanation.

And yet the explanation is in his own analysis, just below the surface, or between the lines. He tells us that "when philosophy became 'technical,' a displacement occurred and literary criticism went 'ethical'" (97). Of the humanities disciplines that Anderson has discussed, he has informed us that history, under the influence of Louis Namier, has tended more and more towards sterility and a moribund conservatism; philosophy, turning away from the Hegelianism of T.H. Green, G.H. Bradley, and Bosanquet, has turned towards positivism and ordinary language philosophy under the influence of G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Wittgenstein (in Europe, Hegelianism remained powerful, and Heidegger, Sartre and the theorists of the Frankfurt School were widely read and discussed even when the Vienna logical positivists were redrawing the boundaries of philosophy). If Anderson's description of the state of the humanities in Britain is accurate, and I think it is, a question one might ask is: which discipline was serving the crucial function of the modern humanities? Where, in the humanities, the raison d'être of which is "to stake out and defend certain areas of knowledge as lying outside of, and beyond, the reach of the natural sciences," was the space for resistance to instrumental rationality? Leavis and his followers knew the answer; in fact, they put together the
answer, in institutional form, over many years of labour. 'A displacement' did not simply occur, as it does in Anderson's hydraulic metaphor. Leavis captured the 'absent centre' by positioning literary criticism in a certain way, in line with the criticism of science and technology he found immanent or explicit in Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens, T.S. Eliot, Conrad, Lawrence and so on. The broad outlines of Leavis's condemnation of modern technological society are, by now, familiar, partly as a result of Leavis's own relentless reiteration of it:

The great and most menacing change brought about by the technological revolution is that it has almost destroyed the creative cultural process, of which the finer operation in that continuous renewal which maintained the human world of values and significances and spiritual graces is on the point of death; it has turned the business of human adjustment to changing material conditions into a reductive process, largely determined by business profit. The worker earns the wherewithal and the leisure to enjoy a higher standard of living by work that has little interest for him and little human meaning; it is something to be got behind him so that he can get away to live--before the telly, over the pools form, in the bingo hall, in the car. Technology, and the financial appetites, mechanisms and potencies produced by it, have determined his culture for him and saved him the trouble. (English Literature
If the condemnation is familiar, the solution is less so, and of peculiar interest, whether immediate or antiquarian, to those working in the humanities in universities:

Now there is no question of trying to reverse, or halt, the advance of technology. There can be no restoring the wheelwright's shop or the conditions of production that integrated work organically with a living culture and associated it in a major way with a creative human response. But that doesn't mean that we must... leave the human heritage... to lapse and let technology henceforward dictate... but there is also in humanity an instinct of self-preservation to appeal to--a sense of vital needs thwarted and starved by technologico-Benthamite civilization.

The university... is the representative of that instinct, and the organ through which society has to make the sustained effort... to keep those needs recognized and provide our civilization with memory and mature purpose. (Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time* 58)

Of course Leavis did not singlehandedly revitalize English: he was in some ways an extreme, in other ways a paradigmatic representative of a more general Weltanschauung, or perhaps anti-weltanschauung. Gerald Graff writes, of the American New Critics: The New Criticism stands squarely in the romantic
tradition of the defense of the humanities as an antidote to science and positivism. The methodology of "close reading" was an attempt not to imitate science but to refute its devaluation of literature.... Ransom... argued that scientific abstractions commit a kind of cold-blooded murder upon the rich, contingent particularity of "the world's body".... Brooks... puts the term "science" into simple antithesis with "love." (Literature Against Itself 133-34)

Martin J. Weiner, in his English Culture And The Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980 describes the astonishingly widespread and intense opposition to industrial growth, and the attachment to organic community and pre-industrial lifestyles in the nation that had led the world into the industrial age. And in Europe, at about the same time, Martin Heidegger and Georg Lukacs as well as members of the Frankfurt school, among others, were writing devastating critiques of instrumental rationality and the effects of technology on social and political life. Max Weber had drawn attention (in the classical sociology Anderson missed in Britain) to the tendency of technological rationality to affect all aspects of life, especially in the form of bureaucratic government. Marx had pointed to the alienating effects of industrial labour on the labourer. And, before Marx, and influencing him, there were Schiller and Hegel, the former being one of the first to lay out a distinct critique of industrial civilization and its perils, with a particular
emphasis on specialization; a critique whose chief terms were taken up repeatedly by a host of thinkers, including the ones mentioned.

So when Leavis went about setting up English as `the vaulting centre of humane studies and the university,' he was not being as quixotic as he might have sounded. As Leavis himself admits, an opportunity presented itself, and was taken.' Leavis tapped into and articulated a very widespread attitude of fear and suspicion of the effects of science and technology, and converted it into a moral crusade. As Anderson's analysis shows, the humanities, as a whole, were devoid of the very impulse that, in a sense, gave birth to them. Leavis and his allies responded to what must have been felt as a tremendous need, the pull of the vacuum created by the humanities in general passively submitting to an instrumental ethos, and philosophy in particular (a discipline playing such a crucial role in Kant's "contest of faculties") `going over' to positivism.

It is part of the strength of Anderson's analysis that he should ignore, or not see, the value of the Leavisite or New Critical opposition to industrial civilization. No ambiguity blurs the sharpness of the portrait. It is imperative that he see Leavis's project as hopelessly conservative, the opposition to `technologico-Benthamite' civilization as feeding into the formation of reactionary elites. And yet it is not inevitable that a Marxist should respond to Leavis's project thus: Marx himself, the `humanist' Marx dismissed by Althusser, was critical
of the effects of technology, in very much the way Schiller was. It is significant that a generation of English Marxists influenced by Althusser (and later, Foucault) have learnt to despise `humanist' critiques of technology; indeed, they have learnt, like Althusser and perhaps Foucault, to think of their own writings as `scientific,' free of the humanist waffle about `life,' `concreteness' and so on. E.P. Thompson, who counted William Morris in his genealogy quite as much as he did Marx, wrote his polemical masterpiece The Poverty of Theory precisely to warn against the danger of this anti-humanist (and in the long run, he knew, depoliticised) Marxism.

The Contest of the Faculties and the Conversation of Mankind

I have argued that F.R. Leavis and his supporters did a great deal to establish English studies as the `chief of the humanities.' Whether this came out of a profound theoretical understanding of the history of the humanities in the university or not I cannot say, and is probably not very important. What is important, as I mentioned earlier, is that an opportunity presented itself, and was seized. This had less to do with individual heroism and tenacity (though these undoubtedly played their parts) than with a certain momentum of ideas, a certain structural expectation (what Anderson is gesturing towards when he writes of `the absent centre'). To put it differently, the university functions best when there is some sort of separation of powers, when the dominance of one type of thinking is checked
by a distinctively different type. In the case of the humanities in British and American universities in the early decades of the century, the dominance of science and its characteristic mode of thinking was responsible for a dangerous imbalance; this imbalance was partly corrected by the new surge of specifically humanist intellectual energies into the discipline of English.

The most celebrated of theories of the university that deploy the idea of a beneficial separation of powers is of course Immanuel Kant's. In his *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant distinguishes between the three 'higher' faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine and the 'lower' faculty of Philosophy. Paradoxically, the functioning of the higher faculties is constrained by the freely ranging criticism of the lower faculty, philosophy. The higher faculties represent tradition; they are essentially conservative. The lower faculty is radical, the voice of reason that dares to know and proclaim the truth. Pierre Bourdieu, in *Homo Academicus*, takes up Kant's idea of an institutional separation of powers, but sets up a rather different dualism: scientific competence and social competence. Social competence, in Bourdieu's view, is associated with "the capital inherited and the economic and political capital actually held"; scientific competence is associated with the "capital of scientific authority or intellectual renown" (48). Social competence, which Bourdieu links with nepotism and lack of intellectual capacity, is homologous with Kant's higher faculty. Scientific competence, making its own way in the university
without benefit of family or class-based assistance, is homologous with the disinterested spirit of inquiry of Kant's lower faculty. If, in Kant's model, philosophy emerges as the crucial discipline and supreme academic arbiter, in Bourdieu's, somewhat predictably, the social sciences occupy the privileged space:

The opposition established by Kant between the two categories of faculties, the first subject to the temporal order which they serve, the second free of all social discipline and limitations, finds its culmination, and reaches its limits, in the relation between the juridical disciplines and the social sciences which, in allowing the liberty or even the irresponsibility characteristic of the temporally lower faculties into the private terrain of the higher faculties, have gradually come to challenge their monopoly of legitimate thought and discourse on the social world: on the one hand we have knowledge in the service of order and power, aiming at the rationalization, in both senses, of the given order; on the other hand we have knowledge confronting order and power, aiming not at putting public affairs in order, but at analysing them as they are... by reducing the established order and the state... to the status of merely a special case. (68-69)

Leavis, in a sense, made claims on behalf of literary
criticism that Kant once made for philosophy and Bourdieu more recently has for the social sciences. And some contemporary theorists, exhilarated by what seem to be the easy victories of Theory, are making similar claims for the refurbished English studies of the last two or three decades. But Leavis was mistaken, I think, to claim such a role for English, and the contemporary theorists who see poststructuralism or Cultural Studies as the new `lower faculty' are also mistaken. A genuine separation of powers (and Kant, for all his faith in philosophy was closer to this in spirit than either Leavis or Bourdieu) would rigorously eschew sovereign or colonizing aspirations. Here, oddly enough, the writings of a thinker who is better known as a conservative political theorist and historian may be exemplary.

Michael Oakeshott is one of the outstanding prose stylists of the century in English, as well as one of its most original thinkers. It is nothing short of amazing to encounter Oakeshott's elegant amateurism in an academic ethos largely dominated (to use one of his own phrases) by the voices of practical activity and of science. In a justly celebrated essay "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," he deplores the tendency to inhibit the range and spontaneity of human utterance. Civilized life, for Oakeshott, can most profitably be compared to a conversation:

As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a
conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. (199)

The `voices' Oakeshott is concerned to distinguish bear a fairly close resemblance to the demarcation of schools in a university, each voice being "the reflection of a human activity":

... the most familiar [voices] are those of practical activity, of `science' and of `poetry'. Philosophy, the impulse to study the quality and style of each voice, and to reflect upon the relationship of one voice to another, must be counted a parasitic activity; it springs from the conversation, because this is what the philosopher reflects upon, but it makes no specific contribution to it. (199-200)

This is very like Kant's separation of academic powers, especially in the placing of philosophy as somehow non-combatant and arbiter. A conversation, however, differs markedly from a conflict or contest in its lack of solemnity, its playfulness:

...the excellence of this conversation ... springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness.... in its participation in the conversation each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversationally and to recognize itself as a voice among voices. As with children, who are great conversationists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play. (Oakeshott, "The
Voice of Poetry" 201-2)
This emphasis on playfulness in Oakeshott's account of civilized interaction is the precise counterpart of Schiller's play-drive (which I discuss in the last chapter). For Oakeshott, as for Schiller, man is most truly human when he plays. Of late, however, man has become more inhuman, less playful:

In recent centuries the conversation, both in public and within ourselves, has become boring because it has been engrossed by two voices, the voice of practical activity and the voice of `science': to know and to contrive are our pre-eminent occupations.... But for a conversation to be appropriated by one or two voices is an insidious vice because in the passage of time it takes on the appearance of a virtue.... Consequently an established monopoly will not only make it difficult for another voice to be heard, but it will also make it seem proper that it should not be heard: it is convicted in advance of irrelevance. ("The Voice of Poetry" 202)

This description of the appropriation of a conversation, in the course of which one of the voices is `convicted in advance of irrelevance' matches the institutional change of topic I have been discussing. And Oakeshott's `modest undertaking' in response to the threat is of particular significance to people in English studies:

My proposal is to consider again the voice of poetry;
to consider it as it speaks in the conversation. . . . And if what is now needed is some relief from the monotony of a conversation too long appropriated by politics and science, it may be supposed that an inquiry into the quality and significance of the voice of poetry may do something in this interest. (203)

Oakeshott's urbane analysis and his suggestions for amelioration, it seems to me, are distinctly superior to Kant's in that no 'voice' arbitrates:

... the only apology for poetry worth considering is one which seeks to discern the place and quality of the voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind—a conversation where each voice speaks in its own idiom, where from time to time one voice may speak louder than others, but where none has natural superiority, let alone primacy. ("The Voice of Poetry" 241)

Oakeshott's essay is concerned with human utterance in general, a considerably larger sphere than that I have been considering, that of the relations between disciplines in the university. But elsewhere he has written about the university, in terms very similar to those he employs in "The Voice of Poetry" essay:

... the identity of a culture and of liberal learning remains obscure until we have some conception of the relationship of its components. Now each of these languages constitutes the terms of a distinct, conditional understanding of the world and a similarly
distinct idiom of human self-understanding. Their virtue is to be different from one another.... Perhaps we may recognize liberal learning as an initiation into the art of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices; to distinguish their different modes of utterance, to acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to this conversational relationship and thus to make our début dans la vie humaine. (The Voice of Liberal Learning 38-39)

The Positivism of Poststructuralism

What impact does poststructuralism have on the contest of faculties, or on the conversation of the university? Richard Rorty, in an interesting discussion of poststructuralism and its impact on academic disciplines, takes the view diametrically opposed to the view argued here: he sees poststructuralists as resisting the claims of science. He would, however, agree that poststructuralists have succeeded in changing the topic. He thinks they have managed "to put the other disciplines in their places" ("Idealism and Textualism" 155), a development he views with approval, for reasons of his own.

My own impression is that poststructuralism has the effect of supporting positivism by undoing the science vs. humanities oppositional framework. By attacking traditional literary studies from an anti-humanist position, i.e. by launching a totalizing attack, it undermines that discipline's ability to oppose
scientific hegemony. (For instance, Derridean deconstruction, taken seriously, undermines the Leavisite or New Critical project of deploying the Romantic or modernist energies of Blake or D.H. Lawrence against a stultifying industrial civilization by urging that the intention of the author being studied cannot be determined, or that the deconstruction empties the text of meaning, or that unpicking the binary oppositions demonstrates that the author is saying precisely the opposite of what it had been assumed he/she was saying). By emphasizing professionalism it undermines the carefully maintained balance between professionalism and amateurism characteristic of many of the earlier practitioners of English studies. And, in the terms of Oakeshott's metaphor, it further subdues the voice of poetry by urging, on the one hand, that it is meaningless (significantly, always a weapon in the arsenal of those primarily concerned with practical activity or with science); or, on the other hand, that it is meaningful only as a means of perpetuating the power of the already powerful.

There are other indications that many poststructuralist writings can be more easily assimilated to the voices of practical activity and of science than to that of poetry: Stanley Rosen comments on the "technophilia, the characteristic eros of the twentieth century, [that] is widespread among our academic hermeneuticists" (144).

Perhaps the most bizarre instances of what may be called the scientism of anti-scientism are to be found in the work of Michel
Foucault (Habermas describes it bluntly as positivist, and Perry Anderson comments on his 'technocratic functionalism'). At one level, Foucault's studiedly neutral descriptions of punitive legislation or the workings of asylums and prisons demand to be read as critiques of structures and institutions, more especially structures of thought derived from an optimistic and rational Enlightenment humanism. Read thus, Foucault's work can be assimilated to the earlier critiques of instrumental rationality made by Adorno and Horkheimer, or Herbert Marcuse, or even Heidegger. But Foucault's own refusal of anything resembling a moral position, his insistence that power is not just oppressive, but productive, and permeates all aspects of existence, makes it difficult to class him with these thinkers. And what are we to make of his fondness for historical ruptures, dated with immense precision? What are they doing in the work of someone who wishes to expose the 'mathesis' of earlier times, a mathesis which is a universal science of measurement and order? Gillian Rose, in a brilliant analysis of Foucault's anti-humanist positivism, observes: "The Order of Things should be read not as the first attempt since Nietzsche to interrupt our anthropological slumber but as a renewed attempt to drug us into the far deeper sleep of mathesis" (183).

Foucault, taking sociologists to task, sounds exactly like a sociologist. Ostensibly attacking the hubris of scientific rationalism as it is deployed in the human sciences, his own mental world strangely resembles the cold world of particle
physics: his *power' closely resembles the concept of force as it is used in physics, the inconvenient idea of `man' is thoroughly dispersed, and micropolitics looks very like random and meaningless collisions between particles shortly before they are dissolved. If Freud, Marx and Althusser attacked existing science in the name of a better, higher, more scientific science, and if Nietzsche and Heidegger encouraged the tendency to identify rationality in general with instrumental rationality, Foucault seems to have achieved the difficult task of combining these legacies. His would appear to be a science that destroys itself in the act of enunciation.

It is likely that most of Foucault's admirers and even many of his critics would read his work as constituting a powerful critique of science and scientific rationality. Richard Rorty, as I mentioned earlier, argues that poststructuralists (whom he calls `textualists') "adopt an antagonistic position to natural science":

Both [idealists and textualists] suggest that the natural scientist should not be the dominant cultural figure, that scientific knowledge is not what really matters. Both insist that there is a point of view other than, and somehow higher than, that of science. ("Idealism and Textualism" 139)

But there is a paradox here, one that may go to the heart of the poststructuralist `aura'. As Rorty himself points out, in "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity":
It takes no more than a squint of the inner eye to read Foucault as a stoic, a dispassionate observer of the present social order, rather than its concerned critic. Because the rhetoric of *emancipation...is* absent from his work, he can easily be thought of as reinventing American "functionalist" sociology. The extraordinary *dryness* of Foucault's work is a counterpart of the dryness which Iris Murdoch once objected to in the writing of British analytic philosophers. It is a dryness produced by a lack of *identification* with any social context, any communication. (172)

What this suggests (and this holds for Derrida and his followers as well) is that a bizarre new *positivist anti-science* discourse may be the really original feature of poststructuralist writing. As Rorty hints, functionalist sociology, rather than the natural sciences, may be the paradigm poststructuralists set up as their ideal.¹⁴ We may do well to remember that very few natural scientists were as positivist as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, among the fathers of modern sociology. So we may grant that poststructuralists like Foucault *adopt* an antagonistic position to natural *science,* while retaining our suspicion that they are positivist. For one thing, *adopting a position* is *self-evidently* distinct from *believing something.* Rorty may also be right to think that *textualists* have *put* natural science in *its place* (though university funding does not seem to reflect this new hierarchy); what he crucially omits to
mention is that they do this, or attempt to do this, by using the methods of science.¹⁵

In this discussion of Foucault's work, and in the later discussion of Althusser's, I am obviously trying to make a distinction between the humanist critique of science and the anti-humanist, poststructuralist one. The anti-humanist critique, by dissolving the human subject and by conflating rationality per se with instrumental rationality, delivers itself into the hands of that instrumental rationality. It inevitably finds itself celebrating the inhuman forces that instrumental rationality unleashes. This characteristically blurring move is nicely captured by Habermas, who contrasts the critiques of neo-Nietzscheans and poststructuralists unfavourably with those of Hegel, Marx, Weber and Lukacs:

Enlightenment and manipulation, the conscious and the unconscious, forces of production and forces of destruction, expressive self-realization and repressive desublimation, effects that ensure freedom and those that remove it--now all these moments flow into one another.... Now the differences and oppositions are so undermined and even collapsed that critique can no longer discern contrasts, shadings, and ambivalent tones within the flat and faded landscape of a totally administered, calculated, and power-laden world. (Philosophical Discourse 338)

Hostility towards the idea of the human subject is one of
the mainstays of poststructuralism: it may indeed be a defining characteristic. Derrida, in one of his best known passages, speaks approvingly of an interpretation which "affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play" (Writing and Differance 292); and Foucault never tires of declaring his 'indifference' to the human subject and emphasizing its constructedness, its 'illusory unity':

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 83)

Characteristic of this critique of subjectivity, of humanism, is the suggestion that the poststructuralists making the critique are taking immense risks, venturing into unknown and dangerous psychic territory (Derrida presumably eschews 'reassuring foundations' himself).

Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and their American disciples can afford to merely gesture towards the dispersed human subject, the groundwork for the actual theoretical dismantling having been carried out earlier, mainly by the structuralists Levi-Strauss and Althusser. Perry Anderson's historical reconstruction of the
escalating attack on the subject marvellously captures the tragi-comic tone of the entire episode:

`The ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him', Levi-Strauss concluded [in The Savage Mind], unloosing the slogan of the decade. When a Marxist reply finally came, in 1965, it was no repudiation, but a counter-signature of the structuralist claim. Louis Althusser's two books For Marx and Reading Capital, rather than engaging with Levi-Strauss's attack on history or his interpretation of humanism, endorsed and incorporated them into a Marxism that was now itself reinterpreted as a theoretical anti-humanism.... But in an objectivist auction of this kind, he was bound to be outbid. A year later his former pupil Foucault, proclaiming a full-throated rhetoric of the `end of man', in turn reduced Marxism itself to an involuntary effect of an out-dated Victorian episteme, and no more than a derivative one at that. (In the Tracks 37-38)

Althusser's anti-humanism is of particular interest for my argument, both because he made a lasting impact on Foucault, Derrida, and many English Marxists, with his brief but enormous influence on European intellectual circles, and because his claims to originality were based on his opposition to the centrality of the concept of alienation in Marxist theory: a concept which has a certain amount in common with the Leavisite
condemnation of technology and materialism.\textsuperscript{16}

Althusser's target, in \textit{For Marx}, is the humanist version of Marxism. He claims that there are (at least) two distinct Marxes, separated by an \textsuperscript{a}epistemological\textsuperscript{b} break.' Before the break, in the `young Marx,' Althusser locates the real enemy: "an ideological drama of human alienation and self-realization, with humanity the author of its unfolding destiny much in the manner of the world spirit according to Hegel."\textsuperscript{17} After the break, which Althusser places in \textit{1845}, is the `mature Marx,' who creates the science of historical materialism. According to Althusser, the post-1845 Marx produces a `theory' of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, etc.. Most significantly, Althusser claims, the new conception defines humanism as an ideology, and radically critiques the theoretical pretensions of every philosophical humanism. Marx's scientific discovery is the rupture with theories of humanism, of the essence of man (\textit{For Marx} 227).

For Althusser, alienation and humanism are inextricably entangled, and both are the products of the `young Marx,' who was too Hegelian, who had not yet struggled free of the clutches of German idealism, who was forced to compromise with the times: who was, in a nutshell, not the `mature Marx.' The trouble with alienation, for Althusser, is that "the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat and of philosophy is once again sealed in the essence of man" (\textit{For Marx} 227).
Marx's concept of alienation, adapted from Hegel's, is fairly complex, but at its root is Marx's clear understanding that in capitalist societies, labour degrades and diminishes the labourer. This happens in four distinct ways: 1) Man is alienated, or separated from, the products of his labour and that labour itself, 2) Man is alienated from nature, 'the sensuous exterior world' which is the context of his labour, 3) He is alienated from other human beings, and 4) He is alienated from himself as a 'species being.' Just one extract from the Economic And Philosophical Manuscripts should suffice to explain why the work as a whole so irritated Althusser, with his hostility towards 'human history' and the conception of human subjectivity this assumed:

We have taken the alienation and the externalization of labour as a fact and analysed this fact. We now ask, how does man come to externalize, to alienate his labour?...We have already obtained much material for the solution of this problem in that we have turned the question of the origin of private property into the question of the relationship of externalized labour to the development of human history.... When we speak of labour, then we are dealing directly with man. This new formulation of the problem already implies its solution. (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 144)

Marxist humanism, says Althusser, "is an ideological phenomenon," that is to say, "a threat or hindrance to scientific knowledge"
The corollary of Althusser's hostility to the idea of alienation, to the human subject, is obvious. In the absence of the integrated, sentient, reasoning human subject, the entire process of alienation becomes meaningless. No subject, no alienation. Or, put differently, without a subject to register opposition to the dehumanizing effects of alienated labour or technological rationality, there are no dehumanizing effects: in a sense, the problem is solved. A complete capitulation to instrumental rationality masquerades as a final victory over it. After Althusser, in particular, this option becomes particularly attractive to the French poststructuralists. It accounts for the depressing cheeriness of Derrida's *jouissance,* Foucault's *indifference,* Lyotard's rejection of *the* nostalgia of the whole.

Althusser's theories have been widely discredited; and instead of the de-Hegelised Marx he endorsed becoming influential, there are many signs of renewed interest in a Hegel without the Marxist appendages. But the anti-humanist posture appears to have emigrated into other discourses, even those which are hostile to Marxism, such as the poststructuralism of Foucault (Eagleton describes Foucault's "aversion to the whole category of the subject" as "pathological"). Althusser's rejection of alienation is an early rehearsal for the poststructuralist rejection of the humanities' critique of instrumental rationality. While Althusser failed (alienation continuing to be an important theme in Marxism), the poststructuralist attempt...
appears to have succeeded, in that resistance rarely takes the form of passionate and sophisticated affirmations of humanism.

 Resistance from within English Studies

I have been discussing poststructuralism and theoretical opposition to its claims as though there has been no such opposition from within English departments. Of course, there has been a considerable, often very sophisticated resistance to poststructuralism; but the very assumptions/ the institutional history of English studies, have made this resistance vulnerable. In a curious way, it is the poststructuralists, the academic feminists who are attracted to poststructuralism, and the Althusserian Marxists, who seem to be Leavis's heirs in English departments: they are the ones with the aggressive polemical style, the ferocious moral energy of the Leavisites. As Gerald Graff puts it:

Resistance remains, but it is largely unorganized, without a coherent theoretical position, and unsure of itself; and it is easily intimidated by charges that it is elitist, dogmatic, dull, reactionary, and hostile to novelty and progress--all of which, of course, it sometimes is. (Literature Against Itself 4)

The point is that these defences, like the defences of the parliamentary university discussed in the earlier chapter, though quite brilliant and coherent, do not engage with the passionate
and anarchic energies that the newer, more radical theories tap into. A moral and political attack can only be fended off by a moral and political defence.

The (more or less) orthodox resistance seems to have taken three main forms (leaving aside complaints about obscurantism and jargon, which tend to run through all the types, and in any case do not, by themselves, constitute a respectable critique). The first, more often encountered in non-academic journals and newspapers, concerns the poststructuralist threat to Western culture, and the means of combating it. Reading these polemical defences of the West is great fun, and I must confess to having read everything on the subject I can lay my hands on. I am looking forward to encountering an enormous tome entitled *The Fall of the West: How Illiberally Educated Tenured Radicals Destroyed the American University and Dismantled the Western Canon By Politicizing the Curriculum*. The trouble with this kind of resistance, however, for academics at any rate/ is that even if the danger is felt to be real, it is impossible for anyone to deal with it except by meeting it head on: that is to say, by affirming that Western culture is superior to all other cultures. This option, fortunately, is now largely unavailable to Western academics, hoist by their own liberal petard. The second, and I think most characteristic form of resistance, consists of a defence of the idea that it is possible to identify an author's intention and talk about it. This is a limited engagement, on grounds that English teachers are fairly familiar with. They can,
after all, point to the text and say, in tones ranging from confidence to despair: This is so, is it not? There have been some excellent defences of this idea; but here again, the problem is that the very proliferation of interpretations in the past and continuing in the present, not to say anticipated in the future, militates against the idea that there is a single intention to point to. This scepticism about intention was already in place with the New Critics, so it is not easy to dismiss similar sounding but more radical arguments made by the poststructuralists, or by pragmatists like Stanley Fish. The third kind of resistance to poststructuralism is that attempted by Gerald Graff, E.D. Hirsch, and A.D. Nuttall. Concerned at the attacks being made on the 'truth' value of language or literature, these writers have attempted ambitious and interesting defences of the 'truth' of language or literature (Nuttall's A New Mimesis, in particular, is quite brilliant). Of the three types of resistance, I find the last mentioned the most interesting, partly because I am sympathetic to attempts to elevate the importance of literature. However, given my assumptions about the necessity of English being, for its own and everyone else's good, permanently in opposition, I cannot but feel that these writers are coming dangerously close to claiming for English what will please the utilitarian and the philistine. Leavis, if asked whether literature had anything to do with 'truth,' would probably have responded that it had to do with something far more important, with the very existence of a
civilization. Perhaps it is an indication of the hard times English studies have fallen on, and the growth of that technologico-Benthamite civilization Leavis feared and hated, that some of its most dedicated defenders are forced to defend literature on the grounds of its truth.

The Culture Wars and Competing Narratives of Decline

From the very beginning, English studies have been at the centre of controversies in the university. If, in Leavis's time, English studies drew attention to itself by persistently criticising the materialism and Philistinism of twentieth century society, and by daring to question the right of scientists to be adjudicators in the realm of morality; today English studies, especially in the United States, is at the centre of a very different kind of controversy, one that has to do with the claims of minorities of various kinds, and with the alleged brutality and exploitativeness of Western culture as a whole.

I suggest that if we look at the way the preoccupations of English studies have changed, and especially if we look at how these preoccupations have changed in terms of certain underlying narratives of decline, we may come to an understanding of why, in the opinion of some writers, the very basis of the university, the conceptual framework and justification of its functioning, has been threatened as never before.

The book which triggered off the recent spate of apocalyptic speculations about the university was undoubtedly Allan Bloom's
The Closing of the American Mind. This book and Edward Said's Orientalism, I will suggest, are the founding documents of what have been called "the culture wars." Bloom's book told the story, now familiar, of a decline of academic standards in the universities of America. If the story was familiar, the details were gripping by any standards, with diatribes against rock music and casual sex on campuses cheek by jowl with discussions of Plato's ideals. Even more unusual was the analysis of why universities had degenerated. Students did not read enough of the classics, and American academics had been overwhelmed by the influx of Continental, and especially German, ideas, particularly after the Second World War. This led to a "Nietzscheanization" (and a Weberization) of academic life, which American universities had not recovered from in the eighties. In fact the process may have accelerated.

If Bloom told a story of decay and increasing relativism in the American university, Edward Said's Orientalism, which had appeared almost ten years earlier, told the story of the West's domination and exploitation of the non-West, from the times of Aeschylus to the U.S. policy planners and Middle-East experts of our own period. "Orientalism," Said writes, "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"
Bloom's and Said's analyses feed interestingly into each other. Most conservatives would accept Bloom's description of the American university as an institution visibly degenerating; but they would be more likely to blame what they would see as the anti-Western biases of influential figures like Said than the value-relativism of somewhat distant figures such as Weber. Also, the classics Bloom holds up to us as exemplary and worthy of imitation are themselves being interrogated, very often in the categories Said used to analyse the West's "style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Said's narrative of increasing domination (of the non-West by the West) is not contradicted by Bloom's narrative of the diminishing importance of the classics of the West in the very place that was intended to keep them alive, the university. The accuracy of the composite picture, of increasing material and instrumental power with diminishing moral and cultural influence, is widely endorsed (and its' effects deplored by intellectuals in the West).

Bloom's `narrative of decline' is part of an immensely influential and popular tradition of apocalyptic writing about Western culture (a sort of Apocalypse Now and Then) which probably goes all the way back to Greek civilization. We have had, in recent times, Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue, and Francis Fukuyama's The End of History and the Last Man, approximately Apocalypse Left and Right (approximately, because MacIntyre's anti-liberalism makes him attractive to the Left, but
his reliance on Augustine and Aristotle rules out any easy appropriation, while Fukuyama, though he is certainly more liberal than socialist, treats progressivism too sardonically to permit easy assimilation to the liberal position). While the decline itself, in the various accounts, is a reassuring constant, the moment of decline tends to vary widely, indeed wildly. With Bloom the coming of German thought into American intellectual life marks the beginning of the decline; MacIntyre sees the rot setting in when the Thomistic compromise starts to lose its authority; Fukuyama, more equably, with Hegel, sees the end prefigured in the rise of rationality, and so on.

With Fukuyama's evocation of Hegel we find ourselves in the presence of the founding-father of all modern narratives of decline. Without Hegel's extraordinarily influential theory of history, I will argue, we would not have the two most famous modern narratives of decline: those of Nietzsche and Spengler. Bloom and Said are only superficially the spokesmen for the primary antagonistic positions of the culture wars; more significant are the narratives of decline, often unacknowledged, that lie behind these positions.

Few philosophical theories have had the scope and sweep, or the influence, of Hegel's philosophy of history. Like some force of Nature, or perhaps more appositely, like a modern law of science, the cunning of reason sweeps through epochs and ages, indifferent to the desires of individuals, advancing like Yeats's rough beast' or Thompson's Hound, with unperturbed pace,
deliberate speed, majestic instancy.' All of history, all the suffering, happiness, death, births, plans and hopes of all mankind, according to Hegel, have a single justification: the furthering or development of the idea of freedom. Greek civilization, the advent of Christianity, the Renaissance and the Reformation, the growth of liberal ideas; all these are stages in the life of the idea of freedom, which approaches its fulfilment in Hegel's own period, indeed in Hegel's own consciousness.

Hegel's philosophy was emphatically not a narrative of decline; on the contrary, it was the most glorious, most ambitious narrative of progress of all time. In the hands of Nietzsche, however, Hegel's historicism is neatly inverted, and the very force that worked to convince Hegel's readers of the truth of his vision was turned against this vision. In Hegel's thinking, Socrates had figured as one of the crucial turning points in the march of Spirit. Socrates was undoubtedly one of those figures of world-historical significance whose role Hegel describes with carefully subdued admiration. But Socrates's intransigent belief in rationality, so vital for the march of the Spirit, spells doom for the Greek city state that nurtured him:

This beautiful unity of the Greek state is doomed. It is doomed because of its limitations, its parochialness. The world spirit has to march on. Hence once the polis is realized the cunning of reason calls world-historical individuals to look beyond. Such a
figure in his own way is Socrates. Socrates turns his allegiance to universal reason. And though he wants to remain obedient to the laws of his polis, he would like to found them on reason. Thus while he maintains his allegiance to Athens to the death, nevertheless his teaching cannot but corrupt the youth, for it undermines that immediate identification with the public life on which the polis rests. (Taylor 396)

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche takes up Hegel's analysis of Socrates' role in the destruction of the Greek city state (he himself later wryly notes that The Birth of Tragedy has 'a strong smell of Hegel about it'). But unencumbered with a theory of the progress of the West, Nietzsche comes to exactly the opposite conclusions from Hegel. As he (with characteristic modesty) describes it: "The... innovation lies in the interpretation of Socratism--Socrates being recognized for the first time as the instrument of Greek decline, as the type of decadence" (Ecce Homo 866).

Nietzsche's attack on Socrates as the chief cause of the subsequent decay of the Dionysian energies Nietzsche valued in Greek tragedy has entered modern thought so thoroughly that Nietzsche's more optimistic conclusion—that the increasing aridity of the (Apollonian) vision of science would trigger off a new round of Dionysian creation--appears to have been forgotten. The link between Western rationality and the wasteland of the modern world was unforgettably forged by Nietzsche; no
later attempt to break the conceptual link has been comparably successful.

Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* is more a representative text than a founding document. Unlike Nietzsche, Spengler cannot claim any very startling originality, except in the matter of the *morphological* treatment of cultures, which most people no longer take very seriously anyway. But Spengler's writing was undoubtedly very influential in its time, partly because it seemed to say what many were already thinking; in any case, I am more interested in its difference from Nietzsche's work, and in the consequences of this difference.

While Spengler, on the one hand, revives the idea of cyclical history, on the other (in the shorter duree, as it were) he displays a memorable animus towards the period of European history in which English materialism became influential. So, if Nietzsche locates the point of decline with the Socratic rational challenge to the life-giving Dionysian energies, Spengler locates the start of the decline with the dominance of the thought of Locke and Hume. The *English sensualists,* Spengler claims, were the chief (and unfortunate) influences on even Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. This hostility to English empiricism is even clearer in his *The Hour of Decision,* written fourteen years after *Decline of the West:*

It occurs to no one to educate the masses to the level of true culture--that would be too much trouble, and possibly certain postulates for it are absent. On the
contrary, the structure of society is to be levelled down to the standard of the populace. General equality is to reign, everything is to be equally vulgar. . . . Superiority, manners, taste, and every description of inward rank are crimes. Ethical, religious, national ideas, marriage for the sake of children, the family, State authority: all these are old-fashioned and reactionary. . . . but let no one suppose that it is a spirit from Moscow that has conquered here. Bolshevism's home is Western Europe, and has been so ever since the English materialist world-view, which dominated the circles where Voltaire and Rousseau moved as docile pupils, found effective expression in Jacobinism on the Continent. (97)

I have quoted this passage at some length to point up the resonances of Spengler's critique with other, and later writings, by cultural critics like Ortega Y Gasset, T.S. Eliot, Leavis, and even Adorno and Horkheimer. Spenglerian bitterness at the effects of the spread of democracy and mass culture is, by now, familiar; but not so familiar that it is not titillating.

Nietzsche and Spengler offer us narratives of decline of great power and suggestiveness. Nietzsche's far more radical narrative, I would suggest, has been taken up by the 'cultural Left' of the American university, while the Spenglerian version still fuels the theories and criticism of the more orthodox group.
The most celebrated theory of decline as far as students of English are concerned is certainly T.S. Eliot's discussion of the "dissociation of sensibility" in "The Metaphysical Poets." According to Eliot, "something . . . had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning" (2305):

The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience.... In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered. (2305)

Eliot's is only the best known variant of a theory that commanded widespread acceptance. Yvor Winters, F.R. Leavis and T.E. Hulme all endorsed versions of a narrative of cultural decline; and for all of them this decline set in, approximately, and not by coincidence, at the time of the growth of Baconian empiricism and Renaissance science.\textsuperscript{25}

Patrick Parrinder has commented on Leavis's closeness to Spengler; and the resemblance is striking.\textsuperscript{26} Spenglerian cultural criticism, in fact, has been the real basis of English criticism in the academy, until the challenge to this criticism from cultural studies, deconstruction, various kinds of feminist critique, attacks on the canon and so on from the seventies to our time. The challenge, I have argued, draws on a counter-narrative of decline, one which sets the date of decline much
earlier, with the very beginnings of rational thought, and one which was first articulated by Nietzsche, drawing on Hegel. The point of the Spenglerian narrative is that critics can attempt to recover a vision of a lost age by close reading or some sort of hermeneutical engagement with the texts of the postulated lost age; the Nietzschean narrative encourages the scrapping of the entire Western rational tradition. The Nietzschean assault on reason is, in a sense, too radical to permit of assimilation. As Derrida argues in a recent essay on the university, "the University's reason for being has always been reason itself, and some essential connection of reason to being." Pointing to the principle of Reason's ungroundedness, its inability to tether itself otherwise than through a rhetorical statement of its reasonableness, Derrida envisages the university as holding itself "suspended above a most peculiar void" (9) (yes, it's that deconstructionist abyss again). Derrida, like many of his allies, is not afraid of the void. Like the students to whom Trilling attempted to talk about the dangers of modern literature, they peer into the void and courteously interrogate it. But for those of us who dislike abysses, voids, chasms, aporias and so on, the way through is the way around, not the way down.

The effectiveness with which poststructuralism has `changed the topic' in English studies is closely tied in with the way poststructuralists have endorsed (usually tacitly, but not necessarily the less effectively for that reason) the Nietzschean version of a narrative of decline. The crucial difference from
Nietzsche's position seems to lie in the fact that Nietzsche attacked the Western rational tradition with a sense of the rich resources of art, and especially tragic art, behind him; poststructuralists attack the Western rational tradition without communicating any sense of a saving aesthetic tradition, even a risky Dionysian one. Refusing what appears to them to be the speciousness of an increasingly reified and distinctively non-tragic art, the new idealists are left with no option but to oppose rationality in the tones (and often the vocabulary) of a sceptical positivism.

Conclusion

I have argued, in this chapter, that English studies, especially in the way it took shape under Leavis's influence and that of some of the New Critics, performed a certain function as part of the humanities in the university, and in society. That function was, roughly, to check the power of science, and to keep certain alternative routes imaginatively or actually open. It hardly needs saying that I consider this a valuable function. I have further argued that the developments in the humanities that collectively go under the name of poststructuralism have had certain effects on this function which seem, by and large, to have gone unnoticed. Whatever the overall benefits to individuals, institutions, social groupings and so on that have resulted from the advent of poststructuralism (and inevitably there have been considerable benefits, perhaps even to those most
dismayed by the advent), it seemed important to point to some obvious losses. The greatest loss, I have argued, is that of a certain oppositional energy, an energy that came from a powerful sense of the danger to human existence of the destructive potential of modern science. The fact that this danger was sensed by some of the most distinguished thinkers and artists of the last two centuries (Rousseau, Kant, Schiller, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Weber, Marx, Matthew Arnold, Lukacs, Lawrence, Rilke, Heidegger, Adorno, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Gandhi, to name only a few) gave this energy a shape and a focus. And the fact that many of the thinkers and artists mentioned looked to art, specifically, for salvation, may help to explain why the humanities, the division of university education closest to the creative arts, have often been in the vanguard of the movement to check the deleterious effects of an unchecked instrumental rationality through one or the other version of an `aesthetic education.'

Having said this, I feel I should immediately add that I do not think that anything resembling a simple shift to an earlier mode of functioning will be at all helpful. It has been said, and said often, and said by persons who are insufficiently critical of their own prejudices, that English studies in the past were parochial, elitist, anti-intellectual, ahistorical, and so on and so forth. All these accusations are true, and for that reason alone there can be no going back. But the charges are not as damaging as some critics think, especially when one considers what was achieved, in the face of the danger described earlier.
What seems to me to be the most damaging charge, one which I take up in the next chapter, and one which was made, in a sense, from within the ranks of the older humanists, concerned the philosophical and literary position from which the defence of the humanities was made: the position we now identify with the term modernism.
NOTES

1. See Habermas's "Modernity Versus Postmodernity" and The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity; Peter Dews's Logics of Disintegration; Gillian Rose's Dialectic of Nihilism; Stanley Rosen's Hermeneutics As Politics; John R. Searle's "Is There a Crisis in American Higher Education?" and "Literary Theory and Its Discontents"; Perry Anderson's In the Tracks of Historical Materialism; and Said's "Secular Criticism" in The World, The Text, and the Critic.

2. Poststructuralism's latent correspondence with the ideology of the free market is obscured by the fact that liberal humanism is so often the target; perhaps what is being attacked is monopoly capitalism/ not the market as such. It has always struck me as significant that the fragmented subjectivity celebrated by poststructuralists is very similar to the psychological state of the consumer in Adorno's 'totally administered' society. This consumer, interpellated in Althusserian fashion by advertisers ("You! John! Are you really happy? Does your breath smell fresh? You cannot really be you until you freshen up with____") lacks a stable identity. He/she is entirely constituted by the texts of advertising. Also significant is the shift in English Cultural Studies, away from Adorno's and Leavis's savage contempt for advertising and television programmes to a considerable sympathy for these, in the work of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.


4. See D.J. Palmer's The Rise of English Studies and F.R. Leavis's English Literature in the University in Our Time.

5. Weiner writes in a spirit of exasperation and despair at Britain's backwardness on the road to progress:

   In the world's first industrial nation, industrialism did not seem quite at home. In the country that had started mankind on the "great ascent," economic growth was frequently viewed with suspicion and disdain. Having pioneered urbanization, the English ignored or disparaged cities. (English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit ix)

6. For one of the best recent discussions of the various late nineteenth and early twentieth century critiques of instrumental rationality, see Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self, especially
the concluding chapter, "The Conflicts of Modernity."

7. Schiller's critique of modern civilization is discussed at greater length in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

8. See English Literature in Our Time, 14.

9. Wolf Lepenies's Between Sociology and Literature_ explores the relationship between English literature and sociology in some detail.

10. Jonathan Culler in On Deconstruction seems to think that literary theory ought to play a dominant role across the disciplines. In this he is no doubt encouraged by philosophers like Richard Rorty, who has consistently upheld the claims of literary theorists against those of philosophers. For an excellent sceptical response to Rorty's ideas from someone in English studies, see Michael Fischer's "Redefining Philosophy as Literature: Richard Rorty's 'Defence' of Literary Culture" in Reading Rorty.

Christopher Norris's promisingly titled Contest of Faculties deals very tangentially with Kant's way of setting up the disciplinary trajectories; like Culler, Norris seems to believe that literary theory will inherit the mantle of philosophy as overarching discipline, but this time through a thoroughgoing scepticism rather than through arbitration or reconstruction.

11. This statement would have to be qualified by our knowledge that the Leavises and the American New Critics were often fighting on two fronts: against positivism (and the denigration of literary criticism by scientists or Classicists), but also against what they saw as the genteel amateurism of their predecessors. So the professionalism of the poststructuralists can be seen as the logical and inevitable extension of a professionalizing tendency already inherent in English studies in the 30s and 40s. Graff's Literature Against Itself has an interesting discussion of the efforts of the New Critics to carve a position for themselves that was neither positivist nor too amateur.

12. Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity 270, 273; Anderson, In the Tracks of Historical Materialism 57.

13. Leonard Jackson, in The Poverty of Structuralism, also argues that structuralism and poststructuralism are irrational and anti-science in orientation. He believes that [poststructuralists'] ideas are...parts of a general oppositional stance towards an advanced industrial capitalist society, in which the discourses of science and engineering have a triumphal and central role, while those of the humanities are marginal and ineffective. They could even be seen as a counter-attack by a relatively unsuccessful group of intellectuals upon the ideology of a much more successful group. (18)
Jackson's analysis, as far as it goes, probably captures something of the motivations of many poststructuralists; but he sets up too simple an opposition between 'good' empirical thinking and resentful, opaque Continental thinking. His own position is dangerously close to an earlier positivism, of the logical positivist variety.

14. Rene Girard, in "Theory and Its Terrors," an excellent discussion of structuralism and poststructuralism, says: Deconstruction originates in a spirit of mimetic rivalry with the social sciences. This spirit always turns the rivals into identical twins, and this paradoxical effect can be observed in our present situation. Even though the social sciences and deconstruction are poles apart philosophically, their ultimate impact on intellectual life and on the academic world is strikingly similar. This, I think, is one of the most curious consequences of the present situation. (234)

15. Aijaz Ahmad, in a discussion of the relationship between Theory and Third World Literature, says: The overall thrust of American deconstruction was in any case highly technicist, shorn of whatever political radicalism there might have been in the original French formation; the net result was to make the text entirely hermetic... It was in the moment of the emergence of this full-scale technopoly--launched, paradoxically enough, in contemptuous dismissal of rationalism for its claims to scientificity--that literary criticism in the English-speaking countries gave way to what came to be known as literary theory. (In Theory 55, emphasis added)

16. To take just one instance, in the section on "Alienated Labour" in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Marx writes: The worker only feels at home outside his work and in his work he feels a stranger. He is at home when he is not working and when he works he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary but compulsory, forced labour. (137)

This is obviously very similar to the passage from Leavis's English Literature in Our Time, quoted earlier, where he describes work as something the worker gets "behind him so that he can get away to live." Of course Marx's analysis of alienated labour is much richer and more complex than Leavis's rather contemptuous descriptions of the leisure-filling activities of the British worker.


18. As David Harvey observes, as a result of the "breakdown in the signifying chain" characteristic of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, "[we] can no longer conceive of the
individual as alienated in the classical Marxist sense, because to be alienated presupposes a coherent rather than a fragmented sense of self from which to be alienated" (The Condition of Postmodernity, 53).

19. For Derrida's comments on 'jouissance' see Writing and Piffrence 292. Lyotard concludes The Postmodern Condition in these words:

We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name. (81-82)

20. Peter Singer's little book on Hegel, which is confessedly a sort of beginner's guide, lists over twenty books on Hegel in the twentieth century alone, and that would exclude the hundreds of specialist texts on aspects of Hegel's thought. My own (very sketchy and inadequate) understanding of Hegel has benefited greatly from my reading of Singer's book, and of Charles Taylor's Hegel. It is safe to generalize that the greater part of the books published in and since the 1980s are at least as concerned with Hegel's thinking as a distinct entity as with identifying his thinking as part of the Marxist legacy. For a discussion of Hegel's contemporary relevance, see Steven B. Smith's Hegel's Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context, especially "Why Hegel Today?" (1-16).


22. See E.D. Hirsch Validity in Interpretation, and M.H. Abrams's "How to do Things with Texts" in Critical Theory since 1965 (437-449) for characteristic and very able defences of the possibility of identifying authorial intention.


25. Both Frank Kermode (in Romantic Image 138-161) and Marilyn Butler ("Against Tradition" in Historical Studies and Literary Criticism 40) discuss the centrality, among English modernists, of what I am calling narratives of decline. Both Kermode and Butler are sceptical about the reality of a decline, and see the narrative as advantageous to the poets and writers positing it in various ways.
26. See Patrick Parrinder, *Authors And Authority* 245.