CHAPTER V

THE ANATOMY OF CULTURE

Since the fall of New Criticism various attempts have been made to relate literature to society, politics and culture. Arnold has invested literary criticism with powers of cultural renovation and stressed the need to propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. In the eighteenth century literature was part of a general culture and ethics. Tatler and Spectator dealt with matters of general interest and appealed to the "public sphere," as Terry Eagleton has argued. Eliot, Leavis and Lionel Trilling were conscious of the cultural dimensions of literature and literary studies. The New Critics and formalists insisted on looking at literature as an autonomous and self-subsisting whole and ruled out the idea of its affinity with politics and culture. In his attempt to go beyond the formulations of the New Critics Frye foregrounded the cultural concerns of literature and looked upon literary criticism as a social science. Frye argues that literature must be understood within its social context, that is, in "the writer's life, in the writer's time, in the history of literature, and above all in the total structure of literature itself, or what I call the order of words" (The Stubborn Structure 88).

A narrow academic attitude to literary studies renders literature a socially and culturally ineffective force. The theoretical revolution of the 1960s has highlighted the dangers of distancing literature from its socio-cultural contexts.
This has been reinforced by post-structuralist, post-modernist and post-colonial theories. Several feminist theories are also cultural in their scope and orientation.

Hartman's polemics on culture, however, is different from the arguments on the question developed by the theorists associated with the cultural studies project. The theorists belonging to the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, for example, are concerned with cultural materialism. The term "cultural materialism" is borrowed from its recent use by Raymond Williams and its practice has developed from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the post war era which can be generally characterized as cultural analysis. Cultural materialism comprises a convergence of history, sociology and literature in cultural studies. An attempt to break the boundary between high and popular culture is at the centre of cultural studies. Cultural critics are skeptical of the idea of a "canon" and instead of a concern for what is "great" they try to relate a text to its cultural context. In a sense, it is interdisciplinary, for it involves studying a whole way of life including the social, the political and the economic. To study cultures in terms of power relations is a critical project pioneered by Michael Foucault who refuses to accept the Marxian way of seeing texts as something repressive. Foucault views texts as complex webs of forces dealing with ways of thinking and speaking. Like cultural materialism, New Historicism also focuses on the dynamics of power within cultural formations. Its area of study goes beyond the literary to the non-literary of the same historical period. Richard Hoggart, one of the leading figures of the Centre for Cultural and Community Studies in Birmingham, gives a working class
orientation to cultural studies. Taking a cue from Williams's dictum that culture is ordinary, Hoggart reads everyday working class life, customs and habits as literary texts. Dick Hebdige, a theorist of subculture, in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* examines the interconnected words of music, fashion and youth in the post-war period, and especially the distinctive forms of clothing, speech, dance and music of the period. Subcultures, a counterpart to the work routines of modern economic life, are seen as a form of symbolic resistance to the pressures of living in capitalistic societies.

Raymond Williams, who has given a theoretical orientation to cultural studies, puts forward an argument which challenges cultural elitism from within the tradition of English criticism. His emphasis on "lived actuality" and "social experience" is of immense significance to cultural analysis (*Marxism and Literature* 128). Meanings and values actually possess a validity in Williams's scheme of things. Williams explains:

I would then define the theory of culture as the study of the relationship between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships. Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this context, analysis of their essential kind of organization. (*The Long Revolution* 63)
What Williams calls the living result of all the elements in the general organization is precisely what gets reflected in his phrase “structures of feeling.” These structures of feeling are tied up with the belief that we are aware of our particular sense of life and our particular community when we notice the ways in which we are different from each other even as we participate in a common culture. Hartman’s view of culture as “embodiment” is close to Raymond Williams’s concept of solidarity, but Hartman’s problematizing of culture is different from that of Williams. Hartman here examines the varied meanings of culture in a fractured post-modern world. With his vast learning and acuity of mind, he discusses various meanings of culture which help us to believe that we belong, that we can achieve wholeness despite the specialization, fragmentation and rootlessness characteristic of modern life.

Culture is a loaded word. According to Raymond Williams it is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society 87), whose relations to the arts including literature have been an issue of intense debate down the centuries. Art has been disparaged for its elitist position. There have been recent attempts by an increasing number of cultural theorists to make art more accountable and to prove its socio-political effectiveness. Recently there has been a decisive shift from aestheticism and the institutional study of art to wide-ranging cultural studies. In The Fateful Question of Culture Hartman discusses the manifold uses of the word “culture” and the development of cultural studies in the past five decades.
Hartman is conscious of the change taking place in the departments of English resulting in a focus on "culturalism" which in its turn replaces art studied within its own institutional history. He takes cognizance of the fact that art is increasingly called upon to justify "its social or material effectiveness" \( (FQC \ 3) \). Art is also employed "to diagnose or affirm particular cultures" \( (FQC \ 1) \). Hartman, however, feels that such attempts do not attend to the ways in which the arts, as observed by Hannah Arendt, are not only "the wordiest of things" but also "the only things without function in the life process of society" \( (FQC \ 1) \). Hartman acknowledges that literature has a political and historical aspect, but he also observes that in literary studies the relationship of ambiguity to the creation of meaning has been the single most important topic of poetics since William Empson. Though he is sensitive to the claims of political and cultural aspects of literature, he refuses to reduce literature to political dogma. His passion for hermeneutics leads him to tease out the meaning of works of art and to pursue the endless play of significance and meaning in the literary work. He makes clear that he does not want to appropriate texts as examples for his theories. On the other hand, his reading of a text seduces him to write commentary on it. He has stated this objective in Minor Prophecies:

> Reading literature is for me a deliberate blinding. I stumble about, sometimes hedonistically, in that word-world; I let myself be ambushed by sense or sensation and forget the drive toward a single, all-conquering truth; and I unravel the text only as it is
simultaneously rethreaded on the spool of commentary. Perhaps this snail-horn text-perception is a symptomatic phase within a cultural and intellectual history-writing that too often has been avidly progressive and despairingly clairvoyant. (207)

The Fateful Question of Culture deals with some of the concerns and anxieties about the text’s relation to wider cultural matters which are anticipated in Hartman’s earlier works Minor Prophecies and Easy Pieces. Speaking of literature and cultural criticism, Hartman claims that cultural theory has a clear focus and is often tendentious whereas modern literature reflects the loss of organic community, or the loss of totality, or the reification of human relations in capitalistic postmodern society. He observes:

Art is neither didactic nor pedagogical, except by fits and starts. Whatever its purposes may be—and they do not exclude the expression of strong beliefs—it does not strive for a universal solution, catechism, or definitive means—end relation. (FQC 63)

In his attempt to define “culture” Hartman stresses its emotional and conceptual resonance and argues that “culture” at present “keeps hope in embodiment alive.” He says that consciousness cannot “renounce that hope in a living and fulfilling milieu” (FQC 26). The term culture is used to mean cultivation of the soul, just as the term “agriculture” refers to the cultivation of the soil. Its power to fertilize and revitalize should not be ignored. Hannah Arendt
expands the meaning of the term culture and emphasizes the soul's need for a human habitation, a dwelling place, that does not simply subject nature to man. The word "culture" has a dynamic and functional meaning as when we construe culture of ideas to refer to "cultivating ideas." This dynamic meaning is again reflected in the phrase "culture of the feelings" which John Stuart Mill used to express the power of Wordsworth's poetry. Connections between cult and agriculture, place and spirit are suggested by the word. The scope and suggestiveness of the word "culture" have now been considerably expanded. Its proliferation has made it almost a "linguistic weed." Expressions such as "mass culture," "popular culture," "working-class culture," and "innate culture" make a certain sense, (FQC 30) because they point to a sizeable group, a quantitative spread, and because they are often applied in a provocative or questioning way. Surely the quantitative factor does not clearly define them, but expresses an undertone of anxiety in such offshoots as camera culture, gun culture, service culture, museum culture, deaf culture, cell culture, football culture, bruising culture, the "insistently oral culture of Washington" (i.e., gossip and slander), the culture of dependency, the culture of pain, the culture of amnesia, etc (FQC 30).

Hartman refers to the endless connotations of the word culture seen in expressions like "culture of weaponry," car culture and corporate culture. He is exasperated with the extension and abuse of the word "culture" seen in terms like a smoker's culture and beach culture, and is wary of cultural studies which concentrates on such fragmentation and the potential of such studies to do harm.
Though the countless senses and uses of "culture" do not converge, whatever the word touches has come to acquire a kind of dignity. He strongly feels that the general culture seems too distant or alien, "while the hope for some unity of being—which I call embodiment—can migrate to groupings often held together by parochial, sectarian, self-serving and even antisocial interests" (FQC 34). The anthropological sense of the word "culture" as a traditional way of life has come to refer to a lifestyle. The legitimacy of such a lifestyle is not derived from tradition, but from technology which challenges tradition.

Hartman realizes that the post-religious ideologies that constitute major forms of cultural studies such as Marxism do not begin with bad intentions. For example, Karl Marx with his "vivid sense of alienated labor and damaged life," tried to usher in "a specific formula for reform and so for hope" (FQC 28-29). But it is sad to note that "all attempts to embody that reform by revolutionary change, to remove false mystique or reified gods of human goods, have so far not exorcised the ghost feeling but continued to water it with blood" (FQC 29). Lately we have "taken refuge in a representation of culture, culture as a collective and destined form of identity," and therefore, Hartman argues, we must force ourselves to recall the ways in which this ambition "sins against the inner dynamic of culture, its creative and unpredictable potential," and "allows cultural issues to become a political pawn in the ethnic wars besetting nation-states" (FQC 177-78).
Hartman rightly emphasizes that contemporary culture studies deal with social relations, work-place, economic goals and increased productivity. According to John Frow and Meaghan:

Culture is thought of as directly bound up with work and its organization; with the relations of power and gender in the workplace and the home; with the pleasures and pressures of consumption; with the complex relations of class and kith and kin through which a sense of self is formed and with fantasies and desire through which social relationships are carried and actively shaped. It is not a detached domain for playing games of social distinction and "good" taste. It is a network of representations—texts, images, talk, codes of behaviour, and the narrative structures organizing these—which shapes every aspect of social life. (Australian Culture Studies, 124)

Hartman discusses another important sense of the word "culture"—elitist culture as in the phrase "high culture" or a "cultured person" or in Arnold's concept of culture as the best that has been thought and known in the world. This sense of the word emphasizes freedom. Hartman explains that culture in this sense goes together with affluence or social climbing and that the relation between being cultured and being free is one of the great commonplaces of humanistic education.
There are endless discussions within the German intellectual tradition about the difference between culture and civilization. The Germans have appropriated "culture" as their own property, wherein the organic, pastoral, and holistic harmonies of the Volk are contrasted with the more decadent, superficial, urbane qualities of the merely civilized. The French are often regarded as merely civilized. The concepts of higher art and higher culture are products of classical German humanism. Hartman cites Norbert Elias's polemics on German "Kultur" and French "civilization":

The French concept of civilization reflects the specific social fortunes of the French bourgeoisie to exactly the same degree that the concept of Kultur reflects the German. The concept of civilization is first, like "kultur," an instrument of middle-class circles—above all the middle-class intelligentsia—in the internal social conflict. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, it comes to epitomize the nation, to express the national self-image. (FQC 205)

Hartman's stress is not on this kind of analysis. He is interested in certain semantic developments within these concepts and he discusses the English idea of "culture" which cannot be merged with either "Kultur" or "civilization." German intellectuals like Fichte and Schiller theorized on culture changing it from "denoting something antithetical to nature or its radical improvement to what could restore us to nature, after our basic connection with it has been endangered
by...culture, understood broadly as human inventiveness in art, craft, technology” (*FQC* 205).

Hartman defines and explains two major senses of culture—the one denoting *a* culture and the other showing general culture. The first refers to a specific form, embodiment or solidarity; the other points to a general ideal, held despite class, profession, or broader allegiance (religion, race, collectivity, nation) and positing a shared human heritage, a second or accrued nature. This distinction is clearly evident in Moses Mendelssohn’s definition of enlightenment and culture. Mendelssohn sees culture as a practical and sociable virtue, an embodied quality, just like a piece of land which can be cultivated producing things useful to mankind by human industriousness. He emphasizes the practical aspect of culture over the universal, especially when he claims that we need enlightenment more than culture. Our way of life as citizens is determined by class and profession, and Mendelssohn advocates qualities of culture and politics for each differentiated segment of society which he hopes will affect the entire nation. He also speaks of a culture that permeates the entire nation and “a culture” appropriate to each class and profession in a society that will soon become even more specialized and segmented because of industrialization. Such a hope can be seen in the claims of cultivating a proletarian culture as against the bourgeois culture.

Explaining his critical project of focusing on the question of culture, Hartman writes:
My purpose in examining the resonances of 'culture' is critical as well as historical. There are, no doubt, other sexy words around—“community” or “identity”—that exude a similar promise. But the historical semantics of “Culture” clarify what we are experiencing in literary studies at this time. The conversion of literary into culture studies arises, certainly, from an urgent and growing concern with social justice and what may be called species thinking (now that we know so much of our history, what does it tell us about human species?) Yet it also arises from an imaginative need that operates at all levels of life, private as well as public. (FQC 38)

This distinction that Hartman makes between “culture” and “a culture,” then is very important for an understanding of the present cultural situation. There are those who regard the “general culture” as hegemonic. If there is an antinomy between “a culture” and “culture,” then it is “a culture” that tends toward hegemony. “Culture,” understood as the development of a public sphere, is what is fragile. The general culture which claims to be on the side of breadth and generosity, is actually imperious or imperialistic. “A culture” can be deeply conformist and seek to limit individual rights.

Related to the antinomy between “a culture” and “culture” is the question of our speech. Hartman discusses the state of language under modern conditions and the relation of the critic to a particular community, to “a culture” as well as
"culture." Commenting on the use of a special jargon or terminology and a negative mode of analysis Hartman observes:


cultural critique can be countercultural in diction and spirit; it is still fighting gentility, civility, middle-class hypocrisy, etc. But there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a terminological vocabulary that is inventive, that renews tired analytic terms by an energetic mixture of the vernacular or the exotic. The question of our speech, the contemporary question, asks how long critical discourse must remain critical: that is questioning; that is, a negative mode—can an affirmation emerge from all this splendid—cerebral, demystifying, deconstructive labor of the negative? (FQC 42-43)

Hartman strongly feels that there is an ongoing scrutiny of language and its communicative powers, and that the culture of words must adequately contribute to truth.

The culture of words is related to poetry and literature, for poetry deals with the concerns of culture. But poetry has an obvious bearing on cultural critique and it cannot offer specific remedies regarding social and political reorganization. What it can do is: "It may take sides, of course, through passionate impersonation; what it does most convincingly, however, with its famous 'concreteness' or illustrative energy, is to provide counter examples to disembodied thought and unearned abstraction" (FQC 61).
Poetry, especially Romantic poetry, signals a disembodied spirit trying to redeem imagination from abstraction. Hartman argues that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is basically a story about phantomication, about the way the human in us is emptied out. The poem's plot first separates the protagonist from society and then restores him to it via a larger, immunitarian consciousness of "man and bird and beast." Hartman's attempt is to see literature itself as a cultural discourse. He says that, "art, like cultural theory, wishes to liberate the "Human Abstract." In Blake, art fights the system: it discloses how ideologies manacle the mind and distort everything creative: modes of thinking, imagining and writing. The question of our speech arises because poems like "The Tiger" are spoken from within the system, from within a totalizing and forceful ideology that has corrupted the very idea of creation. In Christopher Smart's poetry we find a visionary representation of the restored human link with animal, vegetable and mineral world. Wordsworth's nature poetry also presents a new rhetoric of community or it can be seen as an attempt to repair the breach between nature and culture.

Hartman discusses the cultural dimension of romantic poetry and claims that it merges with place, landscape, nature and cosmos. He argues that the romantic poets used the spectral as a device, a technique that enabled them to reveal psychic states:
They needed the internal weather of ominous feelings and imagistic flashes that induced prognostic and even prophetic intimations about the disturbed relation between nature and mankind. The spectral was often a shadow cast over ecology, over nature as man’s home. In terms of conventional classicist the question became: Will nature outlast the physical or mental ravages of war, industry, and city? Would the genius loci of woods, rivers, sky, and field depart forever into Utopian memory. Wordsworth fought a tremendous rearguard action against the bad signs. (FQC 68)

The spirit of a place and its subtle presence is linked to the themes of personal identity, poetic election, and growth in Wordsworth’s poetry which also treats the real world as the source for imaginative representations. Wordsworth displays a rare honesty and force in representing truth.

There is a view that if the common aspects of life in nature are not cultivated by imaginative rather than instrumental reason, nature would cease to be an object of vital interest and eventually render us homeless. By cultivating nature through the feelings we are bonded to the world, “which is the very world/of all of us” (1850 Prelude XI, 142-43). Lacking this “culture of the feelings.” (67) however, our imaginative energies face increasing alienation, to the point of becoming spectral, even apocalyptic, as when Wordsworth encounters imagination
after crossing the Alps, and the disembodied power is compared to a sudden mountain mist, an "unfathered vapour" (1850 Prelude VI, 595).

Hartman's discourse on culture is literary, philosophical and theoretical and is related to the political, to questions about how and for what people live, what they can hope for and what has been done to them. It is a polemic which sidelines an exclusionist concept of culture fostered by the extremists of the Right. Hartman's most important concern in the argument on culture is this: "'culture' at present—I mean the ring and function of the word, its emotional and conceptual resonance—even when it is abusively applied, keeps hope of embodiment alive" (26). Culture keeps alive "the hope for some unity of being—which I call embodiment" (26). Such a hope is seen in the Romantic writers’ attitude to life, nature and the land and its ordinary people. Romantic art has the capacity to extend human values such as sympathy and a "culture of the feelings."

Wordsworth’s poem "The Ruined Cottage" presents a story of broken sympathies and expresses the relation of mute, insensate things to the sympathetic imagination. In "The Ruined Cottage," Margaret is abandoned by her husband as he cannot bear the starvation and suffering of his family and he sells himself into army during the Napoleonic Wars. The story is narrated to the poet by a wandering pedlar. At the centre of the tale there is a silent ruin, a symbol of inarticulate suffering and the speech situation also becomes quite complex. Wordsworth’s poem clearly shows how human sympathies develop. In the poem
nature is presented as a transitional object and her gentle agency turns us from the love of rural folk to the love of humanity in general. The rural speech here reflects nature’s influence on human development. Wordsworth’s moral stance is made clear; his poetry articulates sympathy and prevents language from becoming a “counter-point.”

Wordsworth’s turning to nature is interpreted by some critics as a turning away from suffering. But it is to be noted that the poet, as he uncovers the story, also rescues it from nature’s “oblivious tendencies” (FQC 70). According to Hartman the creation of a narrative space here means the creation of a community. The storyteller and the listener in “Michael,” on the one hand, and the poet and his readers on the other, form a special bond. They come to an understanding of

“how mute, insensate things” affect imagination and convey “the still, sad music of humanity.” A common destiny of nature and mankind is affirmed. Within this frame the Pedlar, as the poet’s mentor transmits an ethos, a consistent integrated, exemplary way of conducting one’s life. (70-71)

There is a resemblance between the Pedlar and the Peasant in “Michael.” The poet reacts to the changes in rural England which are depressing and he strongly feels that a great work of time, namely English nature, is ruined.
Critics who find fault with Wordsworth's focus on nature ignore the fact that Wordsworth is constructing a vision of the community and that it brings about a change in sensibility. Wordsworth admires the pastoral culture, and describes farmers as statesmen. Their attachment to landed property speaks of their feelings of inheritance, home and personal and family independence. Commenting on the loss of this faith in a trustworthy rural imagination, Hartman writes,

It is my view that the failure to carry this imagination into a modern form, the failure to translate into a modern idiom a sensibility nurtured by country life, creates—less in England, because of Wordsworth, than in continental Europe—an unprogressive, overidealized, image of what is lost, and thus a deeply anti-urban sentiment. (FQC 73)

To Hartman Wordsworth is the only writer to carry forward the pastoral culture as a fully modern poet. Though there is a certain sentimentalizing of life in the villages his poetry remains vital because of the way in which he cuts across "the nature/culture divide by conveying the still unmediated, accessible, and integral... presence of a half-perceived and half-created mode of life" (FQC 73).

Hartman discusses three issues that are related to the analysis of the language of cultural criticism. The first is the question of authenticity that Wordsworth ascribes to "Michael" who is almost mute. "Cultural speak" is quite often marked by acrimony and noise. It aims at giving voice to the voiceless
representing those who are marginalized and anonymous. Explaining the second issue affecting cultural discourse Hartman speaks of the difficulty of “forging progressive words that would not simply reverse the signs.” Blake attempted to make a virtue of this difficulty; he refused to abandon corrupted visionary categories. The third question is concerned with the expanding and overdetermined nature of the term ‘culture.’ Somehow the term has become a talisman against the abstract life, against a feeling of increasing unreality, especially when an available doctrine links that tradition to a social and political condition.

The importance of Wordsworth for Hartman lies in the fact that his poetry can have strong and long range impact on culture. Wordsworth not merely reflects his time and place, but also imaginatively figures forth a social order made up of nature and culture together. His poetry does not mirror the historical circumstances but it brings something virtual into existence from an “imaginative” rather than ordinary fact. Wordsworth’s poetry offers an alternative to the inhumanity and barbarity characteristic of Holocaust. Hartman quite often refers to the distinction between rootedness and the state of emigration or homelessness which is characteristic of modern life. As Hartman remarks,

We are too defensive about the contemplative life. Its otium is not otiose. We should recognize more firmly its achievements and its relation to certain spaciousness, especially that of a shrinking rural
world. Not to heed Wordsworth’s understanding of the ecology of mind jeopardizes the bond between nature and mind. The spacious ambience of nature, when treated with respect, allows physical and emotional freedom; it is an outdoor room essential to thought and untraumatic (that is, relatively unforced) development. To curtail it adds to the damage done to the culture of civil society by the totalizing and controlling demands of political religions. (FQC 158)

It is, however, to be noted that what was “otium” to Wordsworth was hard work to others. His farmers are forced to endless industry but the beholder or the narrator of his characters has physical and emotional freedom at its maximum. It is Wordsworth’s “widening of sensibility” (FQC 141) illustrated by his choice of rural subjects and the values inherent in them as well as the simplicity of his language that protected England from brutal assaults of fascism and Auschwitz. Auschwitz evokes the memories of the genocide of six million ordinary men, women and children along with the reminiscence of the survivors.

Hartman thus accords a central place to Wordsworth in his discussion of culture. He regards Wordsworth almost as a cultural icon. The task of a widening of sensibility which is an essential process of culture falls on imaginative literature. In his 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth has spoken of the power of genius to widen the sphere of human sensibility. Wordsworth links genius to the sympathetic imagination and recognizes the ability to feel for others
as a measure of human progress. Hartman observes that Wordsworth’s treatment of the poor and underprivileged people such as,

a mad mother, an infanticide, an idiot boy, a homeless woman, a destitute shepherd, an old disabled servant...constitutes an advance in realism based on that widening of sensibility. (FQC 141)

Hartman sees Wordsworth’s importance in terms of a shift in sensibility which occurred between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries that affects man’s relationship to nature. This shift can be summed up in the phrase “love of nature” rather than “love of man.” Many social and economic factors have contributed to this change, but in the matter of literary sensibility it was Wordsworth’s influence that is most decisive.

In Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth celebrated rural nature and also developed a language of poetry from the way men and women speak in rural surroundings. It is a language “that widens rather than impedes sensibility” (FQC 142). It produces a sense of joy or liberation. Blake used his imaginative powers to awaken the revolutionary and visionary energies in men. But for Wordsworth, the simple and suffering people have something permanent and dignified about them. They are a part of the Nature in which they live. Hartman holds that Wordsworth’s “subdued vision seems more realistic” than Blake’s (FQC 143). The romantic emphasis on the sympathetic imagination is best expressed in Wordsworth’s treatment of the rustics. He dealt mainly with the poor and suffering people of his neighbourhood,
but their life has more than local significance for him. By his mode of representing them in his poetry Wordsworth affected a romantic revolution in sensibility. It has promoted humanitarian feelings in such a way that it can be regarded as part of a cultural process. Hartman in following this argument also connects culture with the training of feeling:

To a great extent feelings are taught, being the result of nurture as well as nature. They are guided by collective morality, restrained or encouraged by it. Art participates in that educative process. *(FQC 145)*

Hartman mentions Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as a haunting poem that imparts education to the feelings and describes Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* as “our first comprehensive...consideration of how we develop into social beings” *(FQC 145)*. Wordsworth shows how imagination can become a socializing faculty, by means of its response to rural life and nature. According to him, love of nature in rural surroundings can lead to love of humankind in a way that expands sensibility. This means that an early, intense love of the sights and sounds of nature is essential to personal development. Nature captures the imagination or imagination adapts itself to nature in a kind of “mutual domination.”

In exalting Wordsworth’s understanding of nature as a prior condition for personal development Hartman does not mean that a peasant sensibility is uniform
or immutable or that the agrarian age is an ideal phase of civilization. But he does hold that the change from the rural to the industrial urban can be made less traumatizing by learning from Wordsworth’s concept of man’s relationship to the natural world and rural surroundings.

Wordsworth has foreseen the catastrophic transition and the coerced collectivization that modernization involves. Hartman uses the analogy of a seismic indicator to describe Wordsworth’s thought:

Wordsworth acted as a seismic indicator and registered all the nuances of a severe alteration that should have produced a transformation not just a retrospective glow, but has continued as a series of disasters. (FQC 147)

Hartman adduces to Wordsworth’s poem “Old Man Travelling” to illustrate how deeply the poet’s thought engages what he calls “the paradox of the sympathetic imagination.” By this expression Hartman means that “the more successful an expanding sensibility becomes, the more evidence we find of actual insensibility” (FQC 144). “The Old Man Travelling” describes the perfectly peaceful and quiet journey of an old man to Falmouth where his young son, brought from a sea-fight, is dying in a hospital. As the old man travels he appears to be part of nature. (“The little hedge-row birds/ That peck along the road, regard him not.”) He is described as being “insensibly subdued to settled quiet.” “He is by nature led/To peace so perfect.” It is towards the end of the poem that we learn
that the object of the old man’s journey is to have a last look at his dying son who had been mortally wounded during England’s war with France. The poem does not aim at arousing pity. It is more concerned with evoking a state of insensibility or a natural stoicism. Wordsworth here depicts a mode of existence in the border state between the animate and the inanimate. Hartman finds deep significance in the evocation of such a mode of being. He finds the compartmentalization of being as having a constraining influence on perception:

Structures of meaning, or habits that compartmentalize Being into such categorizing dichotomies as nature and man, mute and speaking, inanimate and animate, local and universal, can limit rather than liberate perception. (*FQC* 149)

Wordsworth’s poem liberates and expands perception by presenting an animist vision that transcends the dichotomies between nature and man, between the animate and the inanimate. The first fourteen lines of the poem describe “a non-traumatized mode of being” (149), which is displaced by the old man’s words expressing his resolve to be at peace with his destiny.

Hartman observes that Wordsworth’s contemporaries often failed to appreciate the poet’s description of ordinary encounters. Wordsworth has always been sensitive to a voice from the apparently mute and insensate source of nature. It is the still small voice that counts for him. He has recorded the slightest change in a remembered landscape by means of his delicate attention to details. As
Hartman puts it, “there is a great deal we have not fathomed in his peculiar sensitivity to minimal, to that which, precisely, is not eventful” (FQC 150).

In his attitude towards nature Wordsworth does not assume a fixed position. He is both creator and receiver, involved in a complex exchange with nature. Sometimes nature appears in its ominous aspect giving warnings of mutability of the natural world while the poet conceives of nature as permanent and basically unchangeable. The poet feels a bond with nature, but it is not a bond of his conscious choice:

I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit.
(1850 Prelude IV 341-44)

Hartman points out that this “timely utterance” (“vows”) is typical of Wordsworth’s “art of semidisclosure” (FQC 151). He does not record it as a startling episode; but he seems to have experienced it consciously. By his “nonviolent kind of representation” Wordsworth establishes his relationship with nature that is “strongly personal yet not exploitative” (151). Hartman affirms that Wordsworth’s poetry modifies sensibility through the “natural means of daily language. His poetry
cleans the plaque from the arteries of thought, speech, and perception; it dissolves dichotomies and fixations produced...by the “unnatural” diction of both philosophy and traditional religious vision. (*FQC* 152)

Wordsworth is an exemplary cultural figure because he connects human imagination with nature by means of a natural language that is purged of traditional rhetoric. He has also expressed in his poetry “the paradox of sympathy,” an understanding of which is important for the training of sensibility.

Hartman makes a brief reference to Keats, Shelley and Coleridge as poets of cultural significance for the modern times. They have given expression to the power of sympathy while being aware of its limits. But they are not adequately wary of traditional poetic diction, “which often substitutes an artificial language of ecstasy for a truer ‘language of the sense’” (*FQC* 152). Hartman admits that the first stanza of Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” is melodically richer than almost anything in Wordsworth. But it evokes an involuntary strain of self-pitying which suggests how fatally close empathy and ecstasy can be.

Hartman’s list of culturally significant writers is not confined to the romantic poets alone. In his own words,

From Wordsworth to Jane Austen, Shelly, Keats, Tennyson, Browning and George Eliot (to enumerate only English authors), the
imagination is formally recruited for the task of empathetic insight.

(FQC 154)

Hartman takes objection to T. S. Eliot’s diagnosis of romantic poetry as the expression of dissociation of sensibility which emerged first in the seventeenth century. Instead of a dissociation of sensibility Hartman finds in romantic poetry “a deepening awareness of a principle of association that continues to operate in poetic, quixotic, and often unconscious fashion” (155). An acknowledgement of this associative flow and a charting of its structure can be traced in John Livingston Lowes’s The Road to Xanadu (1927). Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) also provides a scientific basis to eighteenth-century associationism.

Eliot was, however, aware of “the sympathy paradox.” He realized that a coarsened sensibility accompanies an increasingly self-conscious intellect. He discovered an affinity between the school of Donne and modern poetry and did not value the freer, mythmaking romantic poets. Hartman observes that Eliot’s “poetics of culture were entirely nostalgic, despite the more radical direction of his verse” (FQC 155). European civilization could not fall back upon a restricted neoclassical view of culture after the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the debacle of the colonial regimes.

Hartman’s reflections on culture centres on recognition of the limits of human sensibility. What is important now is to review cultural morality rather than
to stick to a conservative ideal of unity or of humanitarian progress. The liberal ideal of progress did not succeed in perceiving the dogmatic political sympathy which led to the Holocaust in a mainly Christian Europe. In Nazi Germany two factors contributed to the failure of the cultural morality based on compassion and sympathetic imagination. The first was a totally exclusive doctrine of racial purity. The second was “a pseudo-Darwinian teaching of ‘life unworthy of life’...which was used to justify the killing of the mentally ill or handicapped, homosexuals and so-called social misfits” (FQC 156).

The crucial question, then, as Hartman sees it, is how to maintain compassion develop a pedagogy that can achieve a widening of sensibility. The capacity to extend our feeling is the test of our humanity. But as the feelings are finite they become “overinvested, dogmatic, and even schizoid” (157). As one element of a neglected reality is recovered, another fails and is construed as alien. The absence of compassion turns into a dangerous coldness and seeks to justify itself ideologically. Hartman maintains that academic criticism of culture is based on an awareness of these failures. It attempts

to achieve an ethos of inclusion...to prevent the withdrawal of sympathy from stigmatized groups, and to recognize fully the difficulties encountered as we pursue such ideas. (FQC 157)

Hartman recognizes that a large gap remains between discussion in the academy and the actual politics of culture outside the university. In politics ideals
are inflammable. As Karl Mannheim has put it, political discussion seeks "not only to be in the right but also to demolish the basis of its opponent’s social and intellectual existence" (Ideology and Utopia 34). Academic discussion offers a basic measure of freedom from inner and outer compulsions. Hartman’s guiding precept for the academic world can be summed up in the sentence, “do not give up the concept of aesthetic education” (FQC 157-58).

Hartman argues that Auschwitz has opened our eyes to atrocities and brutalities in the contemporary world, such as the mass scale murder and ethnic cleansing in Cambodia, Guatemala, Bosnia and Rwanda. And it also makes us think of the history of genocide. Hartman observes:

Unpredictable events supplement the significance of prior events.

Whether or not we consider the Holocaust unique, it leads us to review a past that is far from inert, in the sense that we rediscover it, having forgotten or repressed too much. (FQC 101)

Deeply scarred by the experience of the Holocaust, Hartman is ever on the watch for those abstractions that might turn vicious. Like Wordsworth’s pastoral, culture is one of these abstractions and Hartman is convinced that in Germany it is identified with the Geist (spirit) that made the Holocaust possible:

Yet who can ignore, after the event, the fatal convergence of Geist and Holocaust, the deep unease we feel that an ideal aspiration, a so-
called spiritual revolution, backed up by institutionalized philosophy and cultural discourse, contributed to the tragedy? (*FQC* 114)

For Hartman, those abstractions that come wrapped in the sheep’s clothing of their own idealism cause, perhaps, the most unease. He is not a scaremonger, of course, and his way of connecting the Holocaust to notions of *Geist* is meant to serve more as a cautionary warning about the inherent possibility of utopian ideals to turn ugly, even deadly, than to constitute a clear judgment regarding present-day forms of cultural idealism. Nevertheless, Hartman by nature remains skeptical about such things. He doubts “whether an idea of culture can be formulated that remains generous, that is not the pawn of politics and does not rationalize suicidal acts of collective self-differentiation” (*FQC* 192).

Hartman recognizes that the Nazi ideology supported by culture and politics had an immense impact on people in Germany during the reign of Hitler. It was a culture and was even regarded as a spiritual revolution. Even the survivors of the Holocaust continued to live with the burden and the consequence of the event. To Germans during 1933-1945 the idea of culture became an excuse for genocide or the enslaving of millions. Holocaust was a monstrous violation of the principles of human conduct and an ideologically promoted action that many intellectuals tolerated and supported. Hartman observes,

The war against the Jew left a grim intellectual legacy [...] Nazism encouraged mass murder as a principled, even foundational
necessity. Though the genocide was only partially accomplished and eventually discredited by the defeat of the perpetrators, it was carried through with enough vigor and collective participation to raise the possibility that it might have succeeded. (*FQC* 126)

Hartman is concerned with an idea of culture that has overtaken us and with the hopes and dangers that it presents. Such an idea or ideal seeks a “politics of inclusion” (*FQC* 165), whose boundaries are difficult to draw. He feels that the idea of culture is divided against itself which acknowledges the progress made by technopoly and other forms of life that do not depend on technology. This conflicted idea of nature should focus on issues of integration and inclusion. Hartman here turns to the relation between culture, politics and the university. He points out that it is difficult to separate culture and politics. The claim of politics for the existence of an early primordial ethnic consciousness is reminiscent of the realm of imaginative writing. Poetical relics are impressed to invent a history and a tradition. Those who aspire to make history in modern times realize the importance of a tradition-inventing memory which is mobilized against the accelerating phase of contemporary life. As the memory link between generations weakens because of mobility and displacement, our attention is directed to an older collective form of memory, more legendary and oral, similar to story telling. It must be realized that art can help renew a sense of community. The historical context lost to popular memory can be preserved in poems about “far off things/And battles long ago,” and as Hartman remarks, “A genealogical fiction
supports a *present* culture or by adducing the idea of an *indigenous ancient culture*” (167).

Today literary texts play a concealed but an important role in fortifying social cohesion and the national consciousness. Educational institutions function as agencies of the state in promoting such a function, ensuring the cultural needs of a civilized democracy. Hartman points to the weariness that has set in about culturalist claims or prophecies. A moral bankruptcy of culture has been the result of the lofty claims for unity and collective action made by the totalitarian systems. Social reconstruction is based on a theory that acknowledges the imaginative and artificial elements in all human arrangements. Such theory has its antecedents. Modern humanities are founded on the polemics of Vico who based humanistic study on the axiom that we can know only what we have made. Human beings cannot know God or his design but they can know history which is made by themselves. What seemed natural is now regarded as a social, modifiable construct: modifiable in terms of meaning, symbolic content and value.

Culture has been viewed as a continuous and unending structuring activity that constitutes the core of human praxis carried out through tools and language, the principal means of manual and mental labour. The vision of inclusion expands and is strengthened by an appreciation of art’s many voices and the most obvious of these is based on physical, mental or doctrinal characteristics. Hartman argues that in the case of minority cultures, a doctrinal consolidation often takes place,
while new majority cultures may mount a defense against modernity. Inclusion meets fierce resistance in the form of identity politics, and precisely from those previously excluded. Hartman speaks of the idea of an organic development which serves to counter domination of nation over nature. In urging local attachments, the organic idea responds to a fear of losing a ‘natural’ connection with traditional forms of life. Culture, Hartman says, takes on nature as a cultivator does the soil and it also refers to mental labour, the activity that creates, maintains and transplants cultural achievements.

Hartman discusses the relation between culture and poetry which is reinforced by contemporary literary criticism and its understanding of the density of texts. Text must be seen as a web of complex meditations. Hartman argues that there is a culture of nature and that cultural achievement is bound to be at once pervasive and precarious. It must be renewed from within each generation rather than passively inherited.

In *The Fateful Question of Culture*, Hartman problematizes the question of culture and cultural politics. The old cosmopolitan or universalist culture has given way to innumerable subcultures which are trying to assert their individuality and identity with an unprecedented militancy and aggression. Cultural wars, which are buttressed and promoted by ideologies, have turned themselves into political wars. This new phase of cultural/political battles threaten human existence, nature, ecology, the finer values and virtues of man, in short, all monuments of human
civilization. The fateful question of culture thus articulated has echoes of Freud’s meditations on civilization and its discontents. The current unrest, unhappiness and anxiety of man spring from an awareness of his own powers to destroy himself which Freud calls death instinct. Such a possibility of annihilation has been made easier by science and technology which have given man the power to annihilate himself and the world. In this context, the fateful question for the human species is whether man can have control over his death instinct, his instincts of self-destruction and aggression. What we witness in discourses on culture as well as in the actual cultural scenario is not the conflict between culture and nurture, but cultures pitted against cultures which are fiercely trying to devour each other. The fateful question of culture is not whether death instinct or Thanatos can be mastered, for Hartman thinks that Thanatos is as immortal as Eros. The fateful question then is “whether culture can diminish aggression and tilt the balance toward love.” What can help man achieve this is an aesthetic education which is “all the more urgent at a time when ‘culture’ has become an inflammatory word that kindles actual wars” (FQC 14). Hartman’s stress on aesthetic education is to be seen in the context of the undue importance given to cultural politics. Though he does not fully agree with Bloom’s concept of the “autonomy of the aesthetic” (The Western Canon 10), he believes in the transmission of culture and aesthetic values embodied in poetry.

Poetry embodies certain values that sustain culture and teach men to resist violence, barbarism and the culture of Auschwitz. It is in this context that Hartman
context that Hartman extols the virtues and renovative powers of poetry, and the need to transmit the arts and literature. Poetry, as Wordsworth argues, can widen the sphere of human sensibility for the delight, honor and benefit of human nature. Wordsworth’s attempt is to relate genius to sympathetic imagination. He sees the progress of humanity “in terms of an ability to feel for others, a progress facilitated by a faculty that can acknowledge—represent from inside—situations different from one’s own” (FQC 141).

However, it is to be noted that Hartman does not give priority to higher culture over subcultures. Though he critically surveys discourses on culture by a number of thinkers and writers, he does not commit himself to any particular view of culture. He validates the term “culture,” but is quite evasive about what it is. It is to be noted that Hartman refuses to take a definite position. He has confessed that he lacks “methodological hygiene” (Criticism in Society 82). In The Fateful Question of Culture too he states that “several issues broached in this book are described rather than resolved”. He concentrates on the inadequacy of historical accounts in elucidating man’s history. He recognizes that what makes it impossible to create a comprehensive cultural analysis is the existence of underground literary works and the absence of documents for confirming historical facts.
Hartman has always been fascinated by Holocaust writings. He expresses his profound sympathy for ordinary men, women and children, the six million dead of the holocaust along with the recollection of the death. Holocaust denotes a nation devoid of all human sympathy and love and Hartman, endorsing the views of Adorno, claims that the Nazi ideology, combined with culture politics, accelerated the process of ethnic cleansing. Though his book is not an autobiography, there are passages that reveal his inner life: “I begin with a feeling; then I throw some history after that feeling, hoping it will stick, spark, or make the feeling and its consequences...more visible” (FQC 21). He expresses a sense of “being an outsider to life” of wanting to be “a part of all I perceive,” of wanting to feel with others instead of just for them (FQC 21).

What can help us escape from the insidious propaganda of the Nazi culture is the promotion of an aesthetic education. Hartman assigns an important role to the universities which can promote the study of other cultures. The University can play an important role in sustaining culture as it is concerned with learning, and by encouraging learning it surrounds every subject of study with critical and imaginative fullness. There is a culture of criticism that should precede, in the university, all affirmation. The arts too play a special role in this, for they are powerful and complex means of appealing to memory which can go beyond the confines of the academy to reach the general public. University is the place which can foster the culture of criticism and it depends on a commitment to the preservation of the past and its cultures, not as monolithic inheritances but as raw
materials for renewal and reworking. Hartman feels that the weakening of "the will to transmit the body of learning" has put us at a "dangerous juncture" (FQC 176). It is also a weakening of the obligation to remember the dead, and a generation which fails to fulfill this obligation renders itself inhuman. It may be a positive sign that both popular and academic cultures at the end of the millennium are replete with memorialization projects, efforts at taking stock and making sense and also efforts at sympathy, at feeling with the dead. We find ourselves living at a point when the old antithesis of culture and nature has given way to an opposition between culture and cultures. Hartman recognizes that learning about other cultures is part of our culture, and he also acknowledges the legitimacy of multiculturalism. Culture, he believes, must keep alive psychologically and socially the possibility of a unified mode of being.