CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FROM PHENOMENOLOGY TO CULTURAL CRITICISM

Geoffrey Hartman has been widely acknowledged as an American critic of major importance. He is also one of the most difficult, experimental and controversial of modern American critics. His career spans almost the whole of the second half of the twentieth century which was a period of historic change and growth in Anglo-American criticism. The increasing challenge to the authority of the New Criticism and the emergence of critical schools such as phenomenology, deconstruction, psycho-analysis, post-structuralism and cultural materialism mark the rapidly shifting critical scene of this time. Hartman’s development as a critic coincides with, and is in fact a decisive part of, the complex changes and growth in contemporary American criticism. Although he has advanced both the theory and practice of criticism it is difficult to pin down his critical position as he does not align himself with any one particular school or ideology. His strength as a critic is nevertheless connected with his active and discriminating response to the various intellectual movements of his time which have transformed literary criticism in America, taking it to new and exciting terrains beyond formalism.

The existing body of commentary on Hartman reveals diverse, sometimes contradictory, approaches to his works. He has been viewed as an anti-formalist
critic, a deconstructionist, a humanist, a post-structuralist theorist and as “a reader responsible” critic. Chris Baldick lists Hartman along with important post-war critics such as Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, “who belong to the camp of Romantic revivalists.” (Criticism and Literary Theory 127). David Lodge sees Hartman as “a leading light of the Yale School of Criticism” (“Deconstruction for the Masses” 32). Raman Selden, while endorsing this view, places Hartman with J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man as “the American disciples of Derrida” who have developed “versions of deconstruction adapted to literary criticism and especially to the tradition of American New Criticism” (Practicing Theory 91).

The humanistic aspect of Hartman’s criticism has been emphasized by R. H. Fogle, Peter Hawkins and Daniel T. O’Hara. R. H. Fogle finds that Hartman’s critical project, like that of Emerson, is humanistic in its aim. Peter Hawkins observes that Hartman is “concerned with the fate of reading as a humanistic enterprise” (“The Promise of Criticism” 271). Daniel T. O’Hara admires Hartman’s “humanist faith in the redemptive or liberating power” (The Romance of Interpretation 106) that cultural knowledge can bring to the individual and says that “Hartman’s hope is for a revitalized aesthetic humanism” (127). O’Hara further acclaims Hartman as “the ablest and most humane practitioner” of the post-structuralist movement in America (145).

There is a shared perception among some of the commentators that Hartman’s chief critical function has been to mediate between different critical
approaches. Gerald Graff has noted the effectiveness of Hartman’s essays in “demonstrating the proposed reunion of theory and explicative criticism” (‘Rev. of Criticism in the Wilderness 34). While interviewing Hartman, Imre Salusinsky has made the point that one consistent strain in Hartman’s work is “the mediation between Continental, or more theoretical, modes of criticism, and the Anglo-American or practical modes” (Criticism in Society 81). Robert Con Davis has singled out for praise Hartman’s “efforts to domesticate deconstruction, and particularly his attempt to mediate among formalism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction” (Deconstruction at Yale 153).

Hartman’s engagements with philosophical and critical theories ranging from phenomenology to post-structuralism have determined the trajectory of his intellectual development. He has reconciled ideas drawn from European and Anglo-American sources, progressing from an anti-formalist position to that of an enriched humanism, by way of deconstruction, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and cultural criticism. But the consistent focus in his criticism has been on the interpretive activity rather than on developing a coherent theoretical system. Concluding a fine and balanced estimate of Hartman’s critical position, Douglas Atkins writes:

Hartman avoids both the Scylla of hermetic criticism (he is very much concerned with large social and cultural issues) and the Charybdis of ‘secular’ criticism (he forgoes neither textual study nor
the claims of the sacred) [...] He suggests, in fact, responsibility both to the texts we have been given and to the needs of society and the possibility of culture. Hartman’s is the most reader-responsible criticism we have. (“Geoffrey Hartman” 148)

Atkins’s estimate highlights two distinctive features of Hartman’s criticism—his freedom from theoretical dogmas, and more importantly, his responsibility as a reader to understand and explicate the full potentiality of textual meaning. His sense of reader-responsibility has made him committed to a hermeneutic practice that is of great importance for modern American criticism and for literary criticism in general. The present study argues that Hartman’s originality as a critic can be located in his vital hermeneutics and that his successive engagements with various critical theories have the effect of steadily expanding, energizing and refining his interpretive practice. His oeuvre consists of textual exegesis, theoretical essays, critical commentary, articles on culture and the humanities and marginal polemical writings. The spirit that infuses and unifies all his writings is the desire to find “a way of expanding the range and depth of reading” (CJ xvii), to be “expansive without ever losing sight of the text” rather than to construct or defend a doctrinal position (CJ xv). This explains his commitment to a hermeneutic enterprise that goes far beyond formalism.

The circumstances of Hartman’s life and his cultural background have been influential in shaping his response to European intellectual and literary
movements. His anti-authoritarian and anti-totalizing attitude has also been shaped by this influence. Hartman was born in Germany in 1929. At the age of nine he was taken to England because of the persecution of the Jews in Germany just before the beginning of the Second World War. He lived in the village of Aylesbury where he received his secondary education in an English grammar school. It was while living in this village that he developed an interest in the poetry of Wordsworth—an interest which has stayed with him throughout his career. In 1946 he went to New York and rejoined his mother there. In 1949 he graduated from Queens College and started his higher education at Yale. After studying in France on a Fulbright scholarship for one year he received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 1953 from Yale. Then he worked for two years as a draftee in the United States army. In 1955 he returned to Yale and started teaching.

During his student days at Yale Hartman came into contact with three distinguished teachers of comparative literature, all of whom were émigrés. They were René Wellek from Prague, Henri Peyre from France and Eric Auerbach from Germany. In the “Polemical Memoir” which forms the introduction to his collection of essays A Critic’s Journey 1958 – 1998, Hartman has briefly summed up the nature of their influence on his critical thinking. Wellek, who struck him as “an omnivorous reader of unbelievable erudition,” “set an example through his scholarship” (xv). Wellek noted Hartman’s interest in Hegel and started him on a lifelong reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology. Auerbach influenced Hartman in a different way. Hartman was fascinated by Auerbach’s personal style which
confirmed the possibility of going beyond formalism, beyond the schoolmasterly close reading practised by the New Critics" (CJ xv). Henri Peyre, who was “truly undogmatic and immensely encouraging” to his students, strengthened Hartman’s belief that “Art is its own excuse” (CJ xvii).

Hartman developed a close friendship with Harold Bloom who started teaching at Yale in 1955. Bloom has said in an interview, “Hartman and I began as close personal friends, from about 1955 on. We were both of us, Romantic revivalists, but I think he was always more of a European formalist than I was” (Criticism in Society 68). Hartman’s main interest at this time was in the poetry of Wordsworth, and Bloom’s in the works of Shelley. They were bound by their common interest in romantic literature. Hartman found Bloom “already sophisticated and polemical” and was helped by him “to think about English Romantics other than Wordsworth and the modern European writers” he was familiar with (CJ xvii). Later Hartman was grouped with Bloom, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man as the Yale school critics, although each of them was more aware of the differences in their critical attitudes and methods than of what united them.

Hartman’s life was typical of a displaced Jew having a professional career in America. As he did not have any formal Jewish education, he made up for it by reading Talmud, Maimonides and other Hebrew scriptures and acquired knowledge of rabbinic hermeneutics. His purpose was to recover a lost mode of reading rather than discover the roots of his own identity. In the fall of 1958 he
taught English romantic literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and attended a midrash course. Back at Yale, he attended more midrash classes which eventually helped him to apply a speculative type of rabbinical reading to literary texts.

In the 1960s Hartman taught in the Universities at Chicago, Iowa, Cornell and Zurich. During this period his theoretical knowledge was focused on textual reading: “theory meant for me primarily a level of intensity, a way to closer reading, an analytic style, if you wish” (CJ xviii). In the 1970s Paul de Man, Hillis Miller and Jacques Derrida became his colleagues at Yale. His association with them, and especially his reading of Derrida’s works, drew him to deconstructionist theory and its application to the reading of philosophical and literary texts. In the 1980s his enthusiasm for deconstruction began to wane as he grew increasingly aware of its limitations and his focus of attention shifted encompassing larger cultural and humanistic concerns. Two dominant factors which influenced the direction of his thinking were his European background and his association with the Yale critics. Hartman is explicit about the first: “One thing a European background teaches is that the study of philosophy, of language, and of literature connects with one another” (Criticism in Society 82). The second factor has been implicitly acknowledged in the history of recent American academic criticism, although the nature of this influence in terms of affinities and differences hasn’t yet been fully explored.
Hartman has stressed the possibility of another directing influence on his writing, which is "a personal and temperamental factor." He says that in his younger days he thought just of writing and teaching without any specific theoretical concern:

I was very naïve about these [i.e., theoretical] problems for a long time. Something in me later didn't throw off the naivete, but picked up the naivete as an important moment of development. There was a kind of Hegelian sublation of the naïve. (Criticism in Society 72-73)

Hartman translates the Hegelian term sublation as elation. It means that a past stage of thought or mode of being never wholly disappears. Hartman's avowed "temperamental naivete" about theory which characterizes his early writings does not mean that his literary judgments lack a conceptual framework. What it implies is that in the early phase he did not focus on the theoretical consequences of his textual commentary and that he did not consciously single out any critical doctrine to be combated. However, one upshot of his interiorized naivete in his later criticism is his tendency to eschew doctrinaire approach in literary studies. He has taken the position that theory is essentially reductive while the hermeneutic practice allows the critic a fullness, a freedom and a creative play not possible in theoretical discourse.

Hartman's first published work The Unmediated Vision (1954) testifies to his Continental outlook and his interest in comparative literature. But it is free.
from any rigid or constraining theoretical commitment. In his Introduction Hartman describes the work as "criticism without approach" \((UV \ x)\). It offers a study of the poetry of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke and Valery, beginning with a brief passage or short poem from each poet and from its detailed analysis moving on to the other works of the poet, centering on the poet’s "consciousness of consciousness." In each of these poets Hartman traces a mode of pure representation distinguished from that of Judeo-Christian thought, and a direct concern with Nature, the body and the human consciousness.

What is of prime importance in The Unmediated Vision is Hartman’s method of interpretation aiming at capturing "the unified multiplicity of meaning" \((UV \ 45)\). Hartman does not make any mention of the New Criticism in the entire work, but he assumes the need to go beyond the New Critical assumption that every poem is an insulated verbal structure having a single dominant meaning. He proposes and works out, in his own words, "a method of interpretation which could reaffirm the radical unity of human knowledge," which would respect "both the persistent ideal unity of the work of art and the total human situation from which it springs" \((UV \ x)\). This is an inclusive position that allows Hartman the freedom to move from particular poems or poetic passages to their relevant cultural, historical, and even philosophical context. In his later writings Hartman follows this interpretive strategy with varying degrees of emphasis on "the human situation," but never losing sight of the multiplicity of textual meaning. He develops an intense awareness of theoretical issues as his critical career advances.
The Unmediated Vision, however, is refreshingly free from puzzling questions of theory, at least at the explicit or conscious level.

Hartman’s second critical work André Malraux (1960) confirms his sustained interest in modern European literature. He examines the whole corpus of Malraux’s fiction and his Psychology of Art in five judiciously written chapters. Beginning with a few brief, brooding comments on the stylistic features of short narrative units, Hartman passes on to a wide-ranging interpretation of the political and cultural meanings embedded in the novels. Approving of Malraux’s exaltation of art above history, he shows that the survival of man on earth depends more on the evidence of art than on the evidence of history. Further he brings into focus the elements of an anti-mimetic theory envisioned in Malraux’s critical writing and argues that these elements are important for all future aesthetics.

It is in identifying and analysing the technical devices employed by Malraux that Hartman’s hermeneutic skill is best exercised. He offers detailed comments on Malraux’s use of cinematographic methods such as ‘montage’ and ‘fade-out’ and probes deeply into the art of juxtaposition which is an essential part of Malraux’s rhetorical device. Hartman practises “hermeneutical patience” by carefully unraveling Malraux’s art of antithesis in which every statement is questioned, undermined or counterpoised by a further statement. This is in keeping with Hartman’s development from a “criticism without approach” to a pluralistic
approach which allows for the blending of the interpretive activity with theoretical awareness.

Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787 – 1814 (1964) which followed André Malraux has been acknowledged as a classic in its field. Douglas Atkins has said that with its publication “Hartman established himself as a major critic of Romanticism” (“Geoffrey Hartman” 137). Together with Northrop Frye’s Fearful Symmetry (1947) and Harold Bloom’s Shelley’s Mythmaking (1959), Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787 – 1814 effected a decisive shift in critical interest in favour of the Romantic poets who had been virtually excluded from the poetic canon promoted by the New Critics. Hartman places Wordsworth in a large European and modern context and also links him to Milton and the English Renaissance poets from Spenser. The first chapter of the book states what he calls the “thesis” which is drawn chiefly from phenomenology, although he does not go into the details of the theory of consciousness spelt out by Husserl. Hartman uses “consciousness” as a key term in his interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetry, arguing that the abiding interest of Wordsworth’s poetry lies in its recording of the continuous indefinite relationship between consciousness of nature and consciousness of self. Hartman deftly demonstrates that the growth of Wordsworth’s self-consciousness has a bearing on the substance and form of his individual poems and is linked almost intrinsically to the very nature of his poetry.
The interpretive method that Hartman adopts in Wordsworth’s Poetry represents an advance on the method developed in The Unmediated Vision. As in the earlier work he starts with the analysis of short poems, or with short passages from longer poems, and moves on to the other works of the poet, but now the method is modified or controlled by two considerations. First, as he starts with a thesis, an argumentative context is created and both the choice of the poems and the analytical commentary are determined by the argument. Secondly, the individual poems are seen not only in relation to the dialectics of consciousness and nature, but also in the context of a new reading of literary history. The book has four sections—three sections of argument and textual interpretation and one final section of critical bibliography. In the first section Hartman analyses individual poems of Wordsworth including “The Solitary Reaper” and “Tintern Abbey.” The second section explores the relationship between nature and consciousness through an analysis of the Alpine climb in Book VI of The Prelude to show how Wordsworth shifted from the notion of a supernatural to a natural apocalypse. In the third section, which is the largest and most substantial, Hartman traces the growth of the poet’s mind, by examining the poems chronologically and evaluates the poet’s attempt to humanize the imagination and to “new-create the links between nature and the human mind” (WP 337).

It is important to note that Hartman’s mode of analysis in Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787 – 1814 is essentially different from the verbal explication practised by the New Critics. Outlining his critical method he says in the “Preface”, that
"minute stylistic or structural analysis has been avoided, except for a few ‘close ups’" (ix), and goes on to give a caveat against excessive verbal analysis, "An exhaustive analysis of verbal effects is not necessary and may even distract us" (9). Hartman’s attitude has certain theoretical implications which he gathers together and states explicitly and coherently in his next work, Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958 – 1970 (1970). It is a collection of twenty-one essays and reviews, divided into four sections, ranging from perceptive studies on Milton and Marvell to critical essays on formalism, the language of literature and on literary history. It established his reputation as a leading theoretical critic.

In Beyond Formalism Hartman examines the critical scene of his time in a searching and candid spirit and clarifies his position on some of the central issues in criticism. He disapproves of the dominant role of exegesis in criticism, and states: “yet our present explication-centered criticism is puerile, or at most pedagogic: we forget its merely preparatory function, that it stands to a mature criticism as pastoral to epic” (BF 57). He criticizes the word-inspired poetics of formalism and makes a plea “to raise exegesis to its former state by confronting art with experience as searchingly as if art were scripture” (BF 57). This is a continuation of his critical project that aims at broadening both the concept of literary art and the method of textual interpretation. In keeping with this project he also proposes a literary history written “from the point of view of the poets—from within their consciousness of the historical vocation of art” (BF 356). Hartman thus tries to relate the literary and phenomenological points of view while insisting
on the autonomy of art. *Beyond Formalism* constitutes a major statement of Hartman's critical position in his mid-career. Although it does not wholly anticipate the trajectory of his later development, it does stress his basic position that all theory is ultimately reductive and that true criticism is a form of vital hermeneutic activity.

*The Fate of Reading* (1975) which followed *Beyond Formalism* is a collection of seventeen essays written between 1970 and 1975. In a brilliant review of the work Richard Poirier has said that it is "a peculiarly non-academic, even anti-academic book" and that it is "much more intensely speculative than *Beyond Formalism*" ("Star Trek" 21). In this book Hartman continues his attack on the pedagogical and restrictive drive of the New Criticism, but he also opens up new topics of critical interest and offers masterly analyses of the works of Keats, Wordsworth, Valery, Goethe, and lesser poets of the order of Collins, Christopher Smart and Akenside. The critics who are discussed range from I. A. Richards and Lionel Trilling to Harold Bloom and Paul de Man, with numerous Continental critics and philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, Georges Poulet, Blanchot, Roland Barthes and Derrida receiving brief, but intense, attention.

Hartman has stated that his first aim in *The Fate of Reading* is "to broaden literary interpretation without leaving literature behind for any reason" and that "a second aim is to look inward towards the discipline of literary study itself" (viii). An essential part of this project for broadening literary interpretation is his
experiment with "phenomenological thematics." Hartman groups together and investigates a series of poems addressed to the Evening Star written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and demonstrates how they achieve thematic continuity in terms of historic consciousness. Hartman relies on a line of thinking derived from Husserl to support his theory that the history of consciousness is inherent in the growth of literary forms. The literary history conceived, or constructed in this spirit can no longer be regarded as extrinsic to literature. The attempt to link a phenomenological sense of literary history to hermeneutic practice represents an important aspect of Hartman's achievement in The Fate of Reading.

Another significant feature of the book is that it records Hartman's initial reaction to psychoanalytical criticism, semiotics, technical structuralism, neo-Marxist criticism and other modes of approaches which gained currency in the 1960s and 70s. While acknowledging the growing influence of these approaches Hartman points to the ways in which they blur the focus of literary study by assimilating literature to other disciplines and fields of thought. He comments on "the dangerous liaison between literary studies and psychoanalysis" and argues that "instead of pretending to save literature for psychoanalysis" we must try, "to save psychoanalysis for literary studies" (FR ix). Similarly, he speaks of the twin dangers of the "ideological appropriation" of literature by Marxist critics and the "formalistic devaluation" by the New Critics and the structuralists (FR xiii). As for the semiotic approach which is concerned with the production of meaning in the
literary text, Hartman holds that it can scarcely account for the phenomenon of tradition or canon-formation or inter-textuality. Semiotics, linguistics and technical structuralism, in his view, do not help good reading as they “convert all expression into generative codes needing operators rather than readers” (FR 272).

Against these prevalent modes, Hartman proposes an ideal of criticism which is speculative, interpretive and creative. He says repeatedly that criticism is part of our “intellectual tradition” and that the literary essay should be “both creative and receptive” (FR 270). The historicism he envisages relates both to the history of interpretation and to the literary tradition expressive of the history of consciousness. Hartman’s notion of the status of criticism as being analogous to that of creative literature is also forcefully expressed for the first time in The Fate of Reading. He asserts that literary understanding is bipartite, consisting of literary discourse and literary-critical discourse and that the privileging of the text over criticism “reifies literature still further and disorders our ability to read” (FR 271).

Criticism in the Wilderness (1980), Hartman’s next important work, was acclaimed by Terence Des Pres as perhaps “the best, most brilliant, most broadly useful book yet written by an American about the sudden swerve from the safety of established decorum toward bravely theoretical, mainly European forms of literary criticism” (“Continental Drift” 412). The main emphasis in the book is on the Post-New critical revisionist criticism in America, seen intrinsically and also against the historical background of American criticism since the 1930s. The
works of Carlyle, Eliot, Bloom, Frye, Burke and Walter Benjamin are examined with the same close attention with which creative writings are analysed. Pointing out the gulf between the *philosophic* criticism of Continental Europe and the *practical* criticism dominating the Anglo-American scene, Hartman hints at the possibility of reconciliation between the two in the emerging revisionist criticism which seeks to alter the literary canon established by Formalist criticism. Revisionist critics who include Bloom, Hillis Miller, de Man and Hartman himself combine an interest in philosophy, abstract thought and intertextuality with sensitive attention to verbal exegesis and text-centred values. In *Criticism in the Wilderness* Hartman lays down the rationale for this new mode of criticism and strives to defend it against its detractors.

One of the focal concerns in the book is related to Hartman’s idea about the status of criticism in relation to literature. He resents “any assignment of criticism to a noncreative and dependent function with second class status in the world of letters” (*CW* 14). Criticism, he argues, can write “texts of its own” (*CW* 259). This would mean that criticism or commentary has to be treated as a genre having its own history, theoretical basis and rhetorical character. The case for “a freer criticism” is reinforced by Hartman’s attempt to recover elements from romantic and impressionistic criticism, based on the awareness that historically “criticism is a relatively free, all-purpose genre” (*CW* 233), sharing its text-milieu with other forms of literature. In *Criticism in the Wilderness* Hartman places increased emphasis on the hermeneutic task of criticism. In fact he describes criticism as “a
newer kind of hermeneutics” (*CW* 31), as the older form of literary hermeneutics did not fully take into account the equivocations and ambiguities in the text. He points out that in contemporary criticism “the really difficult task is, as always, the hermeneutic one” (*CW* 244). The New Critics evaded this task and the speculative freedom and exegetical daring which it demanded. Consequently one of the main issues of modern criticism can be located in the “quarrel of plain dealers and hermeneuticists” (*CW* 237), the “plain dealers” being a synonym for the New Critics in Hartman’s terminology. Hartman proposes the concept of “a hermeneutics of indeterminacy” which rejects all rules of interpretive closure.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been an important influence on Hartman at his stage. The idea of indeterminacy of meaning and the disbelief in closure are partly derived from him. Derrida’s influence proves to be strong and decisive in *Saving the Text* (1981) which is subtitled “Literature/ Derrida/ Philosophy.” The subtitle subtly indicates Hartman’s way of placing Derrida between or crossing the lines separating literature and philosophy. *Saving the Text* which represents the deconstructivist phase in Hartman’s criticism is his most difficult, most experimental and probably the most controversial work. Hartman does not offer a sustained deconstructive reading of literary texts, but makes intuitive observations on key terms, issues and modes of reading characteristic of Derridean criticism. The main focus of the work is on for Derrida’s *Glas*, a work that juxtaposes the texts of Hegel and Genet with extensive commentary aimed at removing the illusion of stable or determinate meaning. Hartman has stated that in
Savin's *The Text* he is concerned "chiefly with Derrida’s place in the history of commentary, and with *Glas* as an event in that history" (*ST* xv). He finds that although *Glas* is a commentary on the texts of Hegel and Genet, it does not remain subordinate to them, and that it by itself proves to be an art form. Inspired by what he describes as Derrida’s "exemplary contribution to literary studies," Hartman scrutinizes a number of short passages and descriptions from authors ranging from Shakespeare to Tolstoy to demonstrate the possibility of multiple commentary based on a perception of the "equivocal, flexible, tricky nature" of language (*ST* 122, 139).

Hartman does not, however, indiscriminately follow Derrida’s theory or the deconstructivist way of reading the text. As Bernard Bergonzi has perceptively observed, "Hartman’s *Saving the Text* shows him at one and the same time engaging with Derrida, succumbing to him, imitating him and resisting him" ("A Strange Disturbing World" 67). Hartman is impressed by Derrida’s presentation of texts, deviations, endless word plays, chains of connotations and multiple citations. He endorses the Derridean notions of *differance*, indeterminacy and intertextuality. But he also resists Derrida’s influence in the sense that he is critical of those aspects of Derrida’s theory which are inconsistent with, or which run counter to, his own basic critical position. For instance, Hartman does not accept Derrida’s referential theory of art which is inimical to his own concept of art as representational. Similarly, he rejects the deconstructivist view that there is no poetic self prior to the text. His own criticism from his first book *The Unmediated*
Vision involves an attempt to relate the text to the poetic self. Derrida’s theoretical formulations are consequently of less interest to Hartman than his mode of close reading which immeasurably extends the possibility of textual commentary.

In the chapter “Psychoanalysis: the French Connection” in Saving the Text Hartman discusses Lacan’s contribution to literary studies in conjunction with that of Derrida. He examines Lacan’s central ideas about the mirror stage and the relation between the psyche and the language and acknowledges the importance of Lacanian psychoanalysis for literary criticism. But he adds the proviso that the relation between psychoanalysis and literary criticism should be mutual rather than “masterful,” reciprocal rather than restrictive. Lacan’s postulate that “the unconscious is structured like a language” has two important implications. First, it questions the concept of the stable self which has been propounded by ego psychology, and secondly it emphasizes the supreme importance of language and its innate connection with the psyche. Hartman approves of both these ideas, and besides seeing them in relation to the contribution of Lacan, he concludes that they provide us with “a critique of the ‘closure’ imposed on thought or language by the so-called logocentric tradition” (ST 99). It is because of the influence of Derrida and Lacan that in Saving the Text Hartman’s commentary is intensely focused on the heterogeneous, equivocal and contradictory elements in the literary text. This gives his textual interpretations a depth and range not found in his earlier writing. Hartman’s style is also correspondingly difficult, dense, allusive and ludic.
In *Easy Pieces* (1985) which is addressed to a non-academic audience Hartman tries, in Cairns Craig’s words, “to explain and situate the historical achievement of deconstruction” (“Review of *Easy Pieces*” 13, 14). He places deconstruction in perspective showing that it presents one valid response to the “crisis” in criticism caused by the tendencies of ideologizing and text-transcendence on the one hand, and too narrow and reductive a view of literariness on the other. Hartman makes it clear that deconstruction is “a theory of language rather than a philosophy of life” (*EP* 217). In practice it is a method of close reading rather than a metalanguage or a master code. His defence of deconstruction also involves a defence of the Yale school critics who have been charged with projecting “the image of an obscurantist conspiracy emanating from an ‘elitist’ institution” (*EP* ix). Hartman defends the Yale critics including himself on the ground that most of the time they practise criticism, not theory, and that “the latter imposed itself as an outgrowth of reflections on the act of reading” (*EP* ix).

One notable feature of *Easy Pieces* is that it testifies to a widening of Hartman’s interests following the period of his intense engagement with deconstruction. He now addresses larger questions such as the relation between literature and the humanities, the place of literary criticism in the intellectual life of society, the influence of the media, film aesthetics and literary education and the concept of culture. His interest in cultural matters is so pervasive in the book that Douglas Atkins is led to observe, “Hartman’s efforts here might best be
described as cultural criticism” (“Geoffrey Hartman” 146). David Lodge too admires the impressive breadth of Hartman’s intellectual interests and the fervour of his commitment to the life of the mind” (“Deconstruction” 32), so clearly revealed in the collection of essays in Easy Pieces.

Apart from the theoretical essays, Easy Pieces also contains original critical studies of French, British and American writers including Robbe-Grillet, Natalie Sarraute, Jean Moreau, S. T. Coleridge, William Blake, D. H. Lawrence, Marianne Moore, Ann Sexton and many lesser figures. The perspective is not dominantly deconstructive, but generally cultural, historical and literary-critical, integrating the insights gained from the deconstructivist phase. Of special interest is the essay “The Interpreter’s Freud” which, according to David Lodge, “rivals Trilling’s famous essay on the same subject” (“Deconstruction” 32). It is a brilliant analysis of the hermeneutic model established by Freud by his method of dream interpretation and is of central importance for the literary critic engaged in practical criticism. Hartman interprets one of the Lucy Poems of Wordsworth, “A Slumber did my Spirit Seal,” trying to see it in a Freudian context and also seeing Freud in the context of Wordsworth’s poem.

Hartman’s continued interest in Wordsworth both as a canonical figure and as a touchstone of critical methods is further confirmed by his next work The Unremarkable Wordsworth (1987). It is a collection of essays written from a variety of perspectives, over a period of twenty-five years since the publication of
Wordsworth's Poetry. "I have never been able to get away from Wordsworth for any length of time," Hartman observes in his "Introduction" (UW xxv). He sees Wordsworth in relation to European poets and philosophers such as Goethe, Holderlin and Heidegger and estimates his position in the context of British thought, culture, politics and religion. Donald G. Marshall in his brilliant "Foreword" describes the book as "the product of a self-conscious and philosophically grounded method," and points out how these essays "intervene in a wide range of contemporary theoretical approaches from psychoanalysis to structuralism, from deconstruction to phenomenology" (UW viii). The attempt to place Wordsworth in the historical context or in the modern theoretical situation does not, however, refract from the book's insistent concern to interpret the complexity of the poetic text. At the hermeneutic level the main focus is on exploring the dialectical relation between perception and consciousness, imagination and nature, textuality and referentiality in Wordsworth's major poetry.

Minor Prophecies (1991) shows, among other concerns, a marked shift in Hartman's interest towards cultural criticism. The subtitle "The Literary Essay in the Culture Wars" indicates the nature of this shift and its polemical direction. Without committing himself to any particular view of culture, Hartman investigates "the relations among culture, scholarship, and criticism—how they strengthen or oppose one another." He designates this as "a problem that engages the best minds in literary studies" (MP 45). In order to see this problem in a
historical perspective, Hartman makes a survey of British literary criticism from the period of Addison and Steele, who were responsible for formulating a "conversational style" for criticism. This style which drew on the brisk rhythms of journalism and was followed in various ways by Hazlitt, Butler, Shaw, Wells and Orwell. In contrast to this, there developed another critical style which contained a noticeable proportion of technical, even innovative terms, represented by Dr. Johnson, Ruskin, Pater and Henry James. Hartman finds that the two contrasted critical styles have not only continued into the contemporary period, but that the debate about their claim to validity which carries cultural implications, has intensified in recent days. He holds the brief for the "learned" style in criticism as against the "conversational," although he denies that there is any absolute incompatibility or contradiction between the two. He sees them as existing in a state of tension, and says in his "Preface" to the book, "A major theme of this book is the tension between two kinds of critical style: that of the learned specialist and that of the public critic" (MP i).

The cultural question, for Hartman, resolves into a question of critical style. He defends the creativeness of critical prose because it is a technique of discovery and resists cultural prophecies of both the optimistic and the pessimistic kind. Criticism resists prophetic fervour, propaganda and the demands of didacticism. It engages with "the highly mediated status of cultural and verbal facts" (MP 73). It fulfils its cultural function by training taste and disseminating an awareness of creative genius. In Hartman's own words,
Critics help to establish the terms of discourse: about art, but also about cultural matters generally. They educate taste or intuition and seek a judgment [...] that speaks in a universal rather than parochial voice. (MP 16)

Hartman maintains that criticism can be supportive of culture only if it retains its independence as a genre and a mind-set. The basic question for him, relates to the nature of understanding and what sort of critical style can best articulate that understanding. Hartman favours a critical style that is creative, innovative and characterized by technical terms, but not esoteric or obscurantist.

One of the chief preoccupations of Hartman in the 1990s was the intense public and private response to the Holocaust or the large-scale destruction of the European Jews during the Nazi reign. In The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust (1996) he explores the different ways in which the Holocaust is represented in film, art, monuments and historical writing. He disapproves of dogmatic or lopsided narration and insists that the mode of representation should be guided by a quest for morality rather than by any theological or messianic impulse. As a cofounder of the Video Testimony Project at Yale intended for the education of the public on the Holocaust, Hartman had considerable experience of the trauma which marked the public response to the massacre of the Jews. Although The Longest Shadow falls outside the realm of literary criticism, it
indicated his emerging and continuing interest in the Holocaust and its traumas which were to influence his subsequent writings on culture and hermeneutics.

Hartman’s next work The Fateful Question of Culture (1997) is based on the Rene Wellek lecture which he gave in 1992, the year after the publication of Minor Prophesies. It carries on his dealings with the question of the relation between literature and cultural studies which he began in Minor Prophesies. Hartman now treats the question in a direct and sustained manner expanding the scope of his enquiry into culture to include the experience of the Holocaust, and the misuse of culture as “the pawn of politics,” as was done in Nazi Germany and Central Europe. He recognizes the problematics of culture and notes that in our time the old “antithesis of culture and nature” has given way “to an opposition between culture and cultures” (FQC 10). The title of the book refers to the doubt as to “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). The idea of culture as a collective form of identity is often used by nation-states or aggressive ideologies to further the cause of totalitarianism. Giving a cautionary warning against the totalitarian (or conversely, parochial or sectarian) appropriation of culture, Hartman presents a view of literature as resisting “monolithic or complacent culturalism” (FQC 2) and the aesthetic as challenging “political monomania” (FQC 12), providing a “measure of freedom from inner and outer compulsions” (FQC 158). He sees literature as a force for thinking about culture and assigns literary criticism a major role in the
preservation of the past and its cultures, without of course owing allegiance to any
totalizing or exclusionist ideology.

Hartman's conception of the importance of literary study in the
transmission of culture is essentially similar to that of Arnold and Leavis. Poetry
and literature are for him the chief repositories of cultural memory. By the right
method of reading literature we can keep this memory alive and renew and
repossess it in our own generation. He says that cultural achievement "must be
renewed from within each generation rather than passively inherited" and that "to
pass achievement on, to keep it from mutability and entropy [...] is a near-heroic
task" (FQC 174). Hartman himself provides an example of the way in which this
task can be fulfilled by presenting Wordsworth's vital poetry as a paradigm for
what is most authentic in a rural mode of life which "cut[s] across nature/culture
divide" (FQC 73). Wordsworth in fact remains a central figure in The Fateful
Question of Culture for the reason that his pastoral culture, if translated into a
modern idiom, can exercise a redemptive power in contemporary life and thought.
Hartman goes to the extent of asserting that it is because of Wordsworth and
British Romanticism that England is less vulnerable to fascism than Central
Europe. This is probably a questionable assumption, but it does show Hartman's
ability to discover new ways of interpreting Wordsworth's poetry and vision in
response to the deeper needs of the contemporary cultural situation.
The Fateful Question of Culture gives evidence of Hartman’s amazing scholarship, intelligence and theoretical range. Besides Wordsworth, the writers discussed include Coleridge, Blake, Nietzsche, Freud and Schiller, with less important roles assigned to Derrida, Marx, Arnold, Adorno, Wallace Stevens, Raymond Williams and others.

Hartman’s latest book to appear in print is A Critic’s Journey (1998), subtitled “Literary Reflections, 1953 - 1998.” It is a collection of nineteen critical essays selected from his writings of more than forty years. All the essays have been published earlier either in books or in periodicals. Those that have appeared in periodicals, for instance, “Art and Consensus in the Era of Progressive Politics” (1992), “Public Memory and Modern Experience” (1993), “Shakespeare and the Ethical Question” (1996) and “Benjamin in Hope” (1999) have not been previously collected. They reveal Hartman’s expanding intellectual interests as well as his vigorous engagement with current debates on the humanities, on cultural memory, on politics and art and on the practice of literary interpretation. “Polemical Memoir” which serves as an illuminating introduction to the book consists of Hartman’s autobiographical reflections on his concerns as a critic, the formative influence on his work, his Continental connection, the critical milieu at Yale and his own quest for understanding “something of the awe and autonomy of the gift of words” (CJ xxx).
It is clear from the above chronological survey of Hartman’s works that his critical position, far from remaining static, has been evolving over the years in response to the influx of theories which have radically transformed the American critical scene during the last four decades. The new theories such as deconstructionism, psychoanalysis or post-structuralism have claimed his attention, altered his presuppositions about the text and modified his critical practice. But the main lines of his development, despite certain unexpected swerves and turns, have been determined by his individual commitment as a critic, first to the practice of hermeneutics, and secondly, to a faith in the humanizing power of imaginative literature. A further commitment relates to a belief both in the autonomy of literature and in the possibility of linking literature, for interpretive purposes, to philosophy, linguistics, rhetoric, psycho-analysis, cultural discourse and other forms of knowledge.

Hartman has repeatedly proclaimed that he is not pre-eminently a theorist. He has said in an interview with Imre Salusinsky, “I consider myself an engaged historian of criticism, rather than a theorist” (Criticism in Society 80). Clearly, this does not mean that he keeps away from theoretical debates or that there are no theoretical assumptions governing his interpretive activity. Of all his works The Unmediated Vision is the least governed by a critical theory or philosophy, but even here one can discern the features of a phenomenological perspective which Hartman derived from his readings of Hegel and Husserl and an interest in romanticism derived from Martin Buber.
The Unmediated Vision was originally Hartman's Yale dissertation written under the supervision of Rene Wellek. Wellek scribbled on the margin of Hartman's term paper on Hamlet: "Hegel, Hegel, Hegel" and remarked, "I can see you're making progress; how your reading is coming into your criticism" (Criticism in Society 82). In The Unmediated Vision Hartman's reading of phenomenology began to influence his literary response, although indirectly. His method of interpretation which seeks to "affirm the radical unity of human knowledge" (UV x), his precept that "Great poetry is written by men who have chosen to stay bound by experience" (UV xi) and his emphasis on "a principle of continuity [in poetry] identical with total consciousness" (UV 147), all indicate the hidden presence of a phenomenological poetics in The Unmediated Vision. The notion of mediated/unmediated experience is derived from Hegel's Phenomenology and Logic. The Belgian critic Georges Poulet applied the concept of mediatedness in his analysis of the poetry of Mallarme in The Interior Distance (1952) at the time when Hartman used the concept to interpret the poetry and vision of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke and Valery.

In Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 Hartman's phenomenological perspective is somewhat openly stated. He states in the Preface, "When I talk of self-consciousness, the reader will be reminded of a contemporary European (but also American) phenomenon" (WP x). Obviously, he means phenomenological criticism which has carefully elaborated a theory of literature based on consciousness as the ground of experience. Consciousness as in Husserl's
epistemology is understood as a unified intentional act. Consciousness and the object or the outside world are reciprocally implicated in the act of understanding. Phenomenological theory sees the literary work as embodying a structure which expresses the author's consciousness in the very act of understanding the external world. In his study of Wordsworth's poetry Hartman emphasizes the poet's self-consciousness and probes the nature of its intrinsic relation to the life and form of the poetry. He poses the question in phenomenological terms:

The larger question to be answered is whether self-consciousness and Wordsworth's lyricism are connected in an intrinsic and more than occasional way. May self-consciousness, as well as having a bearing on the subject or form of a particular poem, be related also to the very nature of poetry, at least of Wordsworth's poetry? (WP 15)

The whole book in a sense constitutes an answer in the affirmative to the above question. The developing structure of the individual poems like "The Solitary Reaper" is shown to be an expressive reaction of the poet's dynamic consciousness. Imagination itself is shown to be "consciousness of self at its highest pitch" (WP 18). In tracing the development of Wordsworth's poetry from 1787 to 1814 Hartman finds a dialectical pattern of interaction between self and...
it, "circling back and forth between individual text and the collective work of [the] author," is quite characteristic of the critical practice followed by the Geneva School (Contemporary Literary Theory 109).

The decades from the early fifties to the mid-sixties, that is, the period from The Unmediated Vision to Wordsworth’s Poetry can be said to mark the phenomenological phase in Hartman’s criticism. As Hartman himself has said, he has not “dwelt on, or schematized, an emerging phenomenology of Mind” (WP xi), but his attention has been focused on a phenomenological approach and mode of analysis that has enabled him to present Wordsworth and, to a lesser degree, Hopkins, Rilke and Valery in a new light. His achievement in this respect is not less significant than that of J. Hillis Miller who has been acclaimed as a true representative of American phenomenological criticism before he turned to deconstruction.

From the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies Hartman’s criticism was antiformalist in its main drive. A sense of dissatisfaction with formalism as it was practised by the New Critics is quite evident from his early criticism. But at first he was not very conscious of the need for articulating this dissatisfaction in conceptual or theoretical terms. The title essay of Beyond Formalism which was written in 1966 implicitly rejects formalism as a critical theory. Hartman declares, “Yet our present explication-centred criticism is puerile, or at most pedagogic: we
forget its merely preparatory function, that it stands to a mature criticism as pastoral to epic” (BF 56). And again in a more sarcastic tone:

The domination of exegesis is great: she is our whore of Babylon, sitting robed in Academic black on the great dragon of Criticism, and dispensing a repetitive and soporific balm from her pedantic cup. (BF 56)

Hartman continued his attack on the pedantry and donnishness of New Criticism in The Fate of Reading and Criticism in the Wilderness. He labelled it as “plainstyle criticism” which shrinks “our ability to read intelligently and generously” (FR xiii), and criticized its tendency to overobjectify the literary work. Another charge he brings up against Anglo-American New Criticism which is a paradigm of formalism is its resistance to theory, and its virtual hostility to Continental thought.

Formalism represents the opposite extreme of the phenomenological approach. Hartman’s anti-formalist stance can therefore be understood in the context of both his own critical development and the general trend in American criticism which was entering its post-New-Critical stage in the early seventies. As Raman Selden has observed, the “hegemony” of the New Criticism “has been challenged by structuralist, psycho-analytic, neo-Marxist, deconstructive” and other prominent critical schools (Practicing Theory and Reading Literature 7). The important thing is that the challenge from these critical movements came almost
simultaneously, and so, combined with it, Hartman’s critique of formalism proved effective in preparing the ground for the emergence of post-New-Critical theory and practice.

During the mid-seventies and the eighties Hartman’s attention turned mainly to deconstructive and psychoanalytic critical practice. This was the period during which he produced Saving the Text and Easy Pieces, edited Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text and came to be closely identified with the Yale school critics. Hartman has himself specified the time when Derrida and his deconstructivism began to influence him:

I don’t think I read Derrida before 1969 or 1970. It was only around 1973 or 1974 that he meant something significant to me, in terms of the history of criticism. (Criticism in Society 80)

In his writings Hartman does not make any mention of Derrida’s theoretical works such as Of Grammatology, Writing and Difference and Margins of Philosophy. His interest is of course not in the theory of deconstruction, but in the deconstructive reading of the complexity, ambiguity and multivocality of the text. Deconstructivism offered him a method of reading which is more intense, vital, creative and reader-oriented than that of the New Criticism. Like phenomenological criticism it confirmed for him the possibility of going beyond formalism, while remaining intensely preoccupied with textuality. It is important to note that even during his antiformalist phase he acknowledged the importance
of close reading. His objection is directed against formalism’s narrow conception of close reading, its tempered vocabulary and set approach. Deconstruction inspired him to experiment with daring, intuitive, expansive reading which also made him turn to the rabbinic tradition of commentary. This marks a vital stage in the development of his hermeneutics of indeterminacy.

The influence of Lacan combined with that of Derrida in Hartman’s critical writings during this period. His attempt to get beyond formalism required that he should be free from a reductive view of textuality and the theory of interpretive closure. Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory about the relation between language and the human psyche has been useful to him in his effort to achieve these critical objectives. He finds that, ideally, the psychoanalysis of Lacan and Freud provides “a closer mode of close reading,” enabling the critic to take into account ambiguity, ambivalence and indeterminacy of meaning in literary texts. In Freud’s method of interpreting dreams Hartman finds, in particular, “a powerful hermeneutics, rivaling that of the great Western religions” (EP 141).

Hartman freely exploited the Derridean and psychoanalytic insights and ideas to extend the depth and range of his own mode of reading. This gave his writing a post-structuralist aura, which prompted the reading public to identify him with the Yale School critics. Hartman certainly possesses affinities with the other Yale critics, Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man in his alertness to avant-garde European thought and in his radical attempt to modernize literary
study by achieving a difficult blend of theoretical and practical criticism. But even in the heyday of their closest association marked by the publication of the Yale manifesto, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, which Hartman called a “non-manifesto,” each of them was developing his own individual critical position and articulating an individual critical voice.

Hartman too developed in his own individual way, recovering the repressed elements in his earlier criticism. After the deconstructive/psychoanalytical phase (which may also be labelled as the Yale phase) his criticism moves to a larger terrain marked by an interest in the humanities, society and culture. He now comes to an increasing recognition of the importance of humanistic values, which in his view, needs to be enriched by the retrieval of the sacred. As Peter S. Hawkins has said, Hartman is “concerned with the fate of reading as a humanistic enterprise” (“Promise of Criticism” 271) and he wants that criticism should liberate our imagination. The idea, first expressed in *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, that romantic poetry strives “to humanize the imagination, [...] and the spirit of man” (74), returns somewhat insistently, the emphasis now being on the cultural value of reading rather than on unmasking the ambiguity, equivocation and contradiction in the text. The work of this last phase (a still continuing one) can best be described as cultural criticism. In *The Fateful Question of Culture*, which is his most representative book of this period, Hartman contends that “the new world must be helped into existence by the imaginative intellect of the artist” (8), and that “the work of a great artist can have a strong and long-range impact on the way we look
at ourselves as a culture” (7). Wordsworth’s poetry is given a central place in the book because Wordsworth has helped “to create the sense of a particularly English culture” which is less vulnerable to totalitarianism than the culture of Central Europe (FQC 7).

The division of Hartman’s writings into four phases that is proposed here—the phenomenological, anti-formalist, deconstructive/psychoanalytical and the cultural—is not meant to be rigid or schematic. There is a great deal of overlap between the phases and sometimes two or more concerns co-exist in the same period in varying degrees of prominence. This broad division, however, provides a useful framework for tracing the development of Hartman’s criticism and in identifying the underlying concerns in his work.

A general distrust of theory is characteristic of much of Hartman’s work. As Imre Salusinsky has clearly stated, Hartman has “resisted ‘critical theory’ proper, being suspicious of the totalizing, reductive impulse in any theory that would claim to have mastery over literature” (Criticism in Society 76). Daniel T. O’Hara has also observed that Hartman does not restrict his aesthetics “to one reductive scheme or set of schema based upon one pseudoscientific discourse, whether psychoanalytic, philosophical, anthropological, rhetorical, linguistic or a sublime mixture of all these modes” (The Romance of Interpretation 127).

Hartman’s skepticism towards reductive theory is the obverse of his absorbing interest in a vital hermeneutics. In his early phase he developed a
recognizably phenomenological mode of interpretation. As he moved into the domain of deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism he formulated "a hermeneutics of indeterminacy" which also incorporated elements from midrash or the rabbinic tradition of commentary. During this period he pursued a kind of close reading which was daring, inventive, playful and creative. In the last phase his interpretive method and practice acquire a new dimension through its engagement with humanistic and cultural criticism. This study argues that what unifies the entire body of Hartman’s writings is the vitality and persistence of his hermeneutic practice, which is not based on any formal technique borrowed from Dilthey or Gadamer, but has its own method and its own context in the American literary scene.