CHAPTER III

BEYOND REDUCTIVE THEORY

Beyond Formalism (1970) marks an important stage in the development of Hartman’s critical position. In his earlier works he has not addressed himself directly to the question of critical theory. In Beyond Formalism he examines the dominant critical method of his time and tries to reconcile critical theory and practice, emphasizing the formal features of the text and at the same time stressing the need to go beyond them. Beyond Formalism is a collection of essays on novels, poetry, critical theory and literary history, written over a period of twelve years from 1958 to 1970. What makes the book more than an assortment of essays is Hartman’s attempt to combine literary history which he defines as “the discerning of large, continuous, and highly speculative patterns” with literary criticism which is a “very pragmatic effort” concerned with particular literary works (BF ix).

The title essay of Beyond Formalism is a key text, reflecting Hartman’s attitude to a mode of criticism which was highly influential on the Anglo-American critical scene from the thirties to the mid-sixties. Hartman presents his arguments with great subtlety by juxtaposing Cleanth Brooks’ interpretation of Wordsworth’s poem “She dwelt among the untrodden ways” with F. W. Bateson’s
comments on the same poem, and by adding to this critical context Georges Poulet's non-formalist assessment of Henry James's novels.

Cleanth Brooks who is a persistent practitioner of the New Criticism has discovered the principle of contrast and irony in the apparently simple poems of Wordsworth. Hartman quotes Brooks's comment on the second stanza of "She dwelt among the untrodden ways":

The violet and the star...balance each other and between themselves define the situation: Lucy was from the viewpoint of the world, unnoticed, shy, modest, and half hidden from the eye, but from the standpoint of her lover, she is the single star, completely dominating that world. The implicit contrast is that so often developed ironically by John Donne in his poems where the lovers, who amount to nothing in the eyes of the world, become, in their own eye, each other's world--as in "The Good Morrow"... or as in "The Canonization." (BF 43)

Hartman juxtaposes these comments with a quotation from F.W. Bateson's analysis of what he calls the dreamlike quality of the same poem:

Wordsworth's method here is to combine positive and negative ideas so that they cancel each other out ... A simple example of the method is the paradox propounded by the last two words of the
poem's first lines. How can ways be untrodden? ... There are two similar verbal contradictions in lines 3-4 and 9-10 ... If it is possible to use language so loosely that untrodden need not mean 'not trodden' that love cannot connote praise, and that unknown obtains a positive sense ('known to a few') and yet be completely intelligible, the neighbouring oppositions and collocations of grammar and logic also tend to become discredited. (BF 43-44)

Bateson's critical stance is antiformalistic and yet he reaches the same conclusion as Brooks in his analysis of Wordsworth's style. He sees the same structure of contradictions in the antithetical images of violet and star.

Hartman argues that the two interpretations have a common fault—they are non-historical in the sense that no effort is made to relate Wordsworth's style to the more overt or rhetorical style it replaces. The only kind of ideal interpretation, according to Hartman, is "that in which we can cross-check our terms... by relating them to the poet's own or to those prevalent in the poet's milieu" (BF 45).

Hartman states his historicist view in quite unambiguous terms:

Interpretation is bringing the poem forward into the present, which is acknowledging its historicity, which is grounding our terms in history. To do this we must go beyond both Bateson and Brooks and describe as historically as possible the difference between the Wordsworthian "no style" and the stylish style it challenged. (BF 45)
Hartman examines the history of “pointed” style in the seventeenth century in order to understand the nature of Wordsworth’s “plain” style. The pointed style as it developed in the seventeenth century is witty and antithetical, sharp and incisive. The Metaphysical style on which Brooks’ poetics is ultimately based is a particular development of the pointed style. Neoclassicism pruned and smoothened the pointed style to achieve its goal of epigrammatic precision and elegance. In the history of seventeenth century prosody there appears an opposition between the pointed and the plain styles. Ben Jonson tried to blend the plane style with the sinew and strength of the pointed style. Marvell and Herbert were exceptionally successful in achieving this blending of styles.

Wordsworth’s distinction is that he redeemed the English language from the artificiality of the pointed style. Hartman describes the style of the Lucy poems as “a new and gentle plain style” and points out how Wordsworth’s verbal style “purifies the mannered lyric and particularly the elegiac epigram” (BF 47-48). In the light of this brief history of lyric style Hartman makes the point that what Brooks calls irony or paradox “is not an independent structural principle, but is mediated by literary traditions developing in contradistinction to each other” (BF 48). It is only by means of the formalistic exercise in literary history offered by Hartman here that one can go beyond a primary concern with style or form. It equips one to ask the question as to what Wordsworth has achieved by his creation of so apparently simple a style. Hartman thus takes the position that the commentary of Brooks and Bateson on Wordsworth’s style is not formalistic
enough, because it is not grounded on a formalistic understanding of the history of poetic style.

Hartman now turns to Georges Poulet to illustrate how an avowedly antiformalistic critic can become formalistic in his practice. Hartman takes up for analysis Poulet's essay on Henry James. Poulet disregards formalistic features and even chronological distinctions. Poulet's method is to place himself in the writer's consciousness. He aims at rewriting literary history as a history of human consciousness. His method of thematic study has enabled him to periodize the consciousness or cogito of each writer. Hartman regards periodization as "a residual formalism" (BF 52). Poulet does not study the form of James's novels; his compulsive interest is in the centre of consciousness represented in the novels. He tries to unravel James's "consciousness of consciousness" and "harmonizes James with a stage in the history of consciousness that might have been reached" (BF 55). His view of the history of consciousness tends to be too formal and this has a limiting effect on his understanding of what is problematic in Jamesian art.

The main thrust of Hartman's argument is that Brooks is not formalist enough, and that Poulet who is an avowed anti-formalist, is actually too much of a formalist in his conception of the history of consciousness. For Harman the ideal critic is one who will respect the formal properties of a work, while going beyond formalism in the light of the work's connection with literary history, philosophy or its human content. He holds that the study of forms should not detract from
genuine critical intuition. At the same time his attitude to the overworked mode of exegetical criticism is stubbornly hostile. Voicing a suspicion of Anglo-Saxon formalism, he says with evident sarcasm and irony,

The dominion 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...our present explication-centered criticism is indeed puerile, or at most pedagogic. *(BF 56.-57)*

This is perhaps the most scathing attack ever made on the exegetical method so widely practised by the formalist critics. It acknowledges the significance of the formalist approach, while insisting on the need to go beyond formalism. What he objects to is the practice of explication for its own sake and the narrowness of the concepts on which formalism is based.

In the essay “A Short History of Practical Criticism” included in *Criticism in the Wilderness* Hartman has continued his attack on the technique of exegesis. He says that by the 1970s practical criticism has failed “both vis-à-vis society at large and, more peculiarly, within the academy” *(CW 286)*. Practical criticism has given up too much, especially to the social scientists with the result that it has shrunk to a narrow discipline, reducing itself to its lowest social or utilitarian value. Its resistance to theory extends to an opposition to imported ideas from Europe or from other fields of enquiry including the social sciences. It has also
created a rift between theory and practice, so that the only function of hermeneutics is believed to be to aid close reading. Hartman points out that practical criticism "is just one form of exegesis, when the whole history of interpretation is considered" (CW 298). Hartman’s own wide-ranging criticism is centered on interpretation, but it is interpretation on a broader basis than what practical or formalist criticism allows.

In “The Recognition Scene of Criticism” another essay appearing in Criticism in the Wilderness Hartman dwells on the limitation of the New Criticism which “has come to suggest that theory is something impractical, esoteric or apart” (CW 255). Hartman insists that criticism should be open to theoretical speculation. He regards as “literature” the works of great speculative thinkers like Marx, Husserl, Heidegger and Freud. The New Criticism has created “a new isolationism masking under the name of Common Sense, and characterizing what it opposes as skywriting” (CW 255). While the New Criticism views the critical activity as being subordinate to the creative, Hartman thinks of the two as equally important activities, each having a kind of interchangeable dominion. Unlike the New Critics, he holds that criticism should retrieve its creative powers:

Criticism, in short, is not extraliterary, not outside of literature or art looking in: it is a defining and influential part of its subject, a genre with some constant and some changing features. Today criticism is particularly vital because it has recognized that in addition to its
pedagogic or socializing function ... it should take back its freelance, creative powers. \((CW \, 257)\)

Hartman questions the relative indifference of formalist criticism to the writing of literary history. In “Toward Literary History,” one of the longest and most intelligently organized essays in Beyond Formalism Hartman focuses on the central dilemma in the writing of literary history. Literary works have to be grounded at once in the formality of art and in the historical consciousness. The artist in the modern era turns against himself as he is the severest critic of his own medium. Hartman states it in apparently paradoxical terms:

If literary history is to provide a new defense of art it must now defend the artist against himself as well as against his other detractors. It must help to restore his faith in two things: in form, and in his historical vocation \((BF \, 358)\)

The formalist critics had an elitist view of culture which has now lost its force. Today most forms of art question the elitist modes of thought and feeling. Hartman argues that the tendency of the modern critic is to move closer to art “by expanding the notion of form until it cannot be narrowly linked to the concerns of a priestly culture or its mid-cult imitations” \((BF \, 359)\). He further affirms that a larger conception of the literary form than is found in formalist criticism is now in the making. To illustrate his point of view Hartman examines four significant theories. First Marxist criticism, then Frye’s theory of archetypes, and finally two
kinds of structuralist theory, that of Levi-Strauss and that of I.A. Richards and the Aglo-American critics whom Hartman designates as structuralists.

To illustrate the Marxist preoccupation with form Hartman refers to Jean Luc Godard’s film *Weekend* which he describes as a “filmic self-criticism of an extreme kind” (*BF* 359). Godard attempts in the film a ruthless violation of form. Every filmic cliché is exposed to scathing lyrical ridicule. For Godard it is not the coherence of form that is important, but its violation. As Hartman observes pointedly, Godard hopes that by violating all taboos something deeper than the gratuitous values of a leisure class might emerge” (*BF* 360).

Frye’s approach to the question of the elitism of the art object is more familiar than that of the Marxist critics. He points to the similarities between the structure of primitive myths and the formal principle of all art. He removes “the distinction of kind between sacred and secular, or between popular and highbrow” (*BF* 361), thus breaking down the barrier which prevents art from becoming widely influential. Hartman observes that Frye’s sense of the commonality of art is “radically Protestant” in the sense that “every man is imagination’s priest” (*BF* 361). So for Frye good art is that which expands the imagination, and bad art is that which restricts it.

Hartman admires Frye’s work for expanding our concept of form and for redeeming the individual literary work from divisive ideas of cult and culture. He also focuses on a basic difference between the approach of the Marxist critic and
that of Frye. The Marxist critic evaluates the individual work in terms of its relation to the proletariat-elite, base-superstructure split. But Frye's structural approach aims at developing a descriptive rather than an evaluative purpose. Frye is more interested in improving the critical faculty of the reader than in evaluating the work. He writes more about criticism than about literature. T.S. Eliot has advanced the view that the advent of every original work of art compels us to revise our view of all preceding works. Frye has argued that this change is a change in our consciousness of art and can therefore occur only when mediated by criticism. This interplay between art and the critic, between the work and the reader helps to eliminate whatever elitist elements remain in the literary work.

Although Frye frees art from elitism, he has failed, as Hartman puts it, "to bring together the form of art and the form of its historical consciousness" (BF 363). The same failure can be discerned in Levi-Strauss' anthropological structuralism. According to Levi-Strauss, every society has its internal conflicts which are resolved in its myths. A science of myth is possible since every society uses the same basic method to resolve these conflicts. From the structuralist's point of view, a myth has a two-fold form—its surface structure reflects local traditions, and its deep structure which is logical can be expressed in mathematical terms. Hartman maintains that art occupies the middle-ground between myth and mathematics, and that Levi-Strauss' description does not take into account aspects of art such as "Tone, rhythm, humour, surprises, displacement" (BF 364). Levi Strauss links the form of the art work with a type of social consciousness, but his
theory of form is not joined with a critical account of the artist's historical consciousness.

The last theory of form which Hartman examines is that of I. A. Richards and the New Criticism. It is more clearly focused on the literary work than the theories of Marxist critics, Northrop Frye or Levi-Strauss. Richards sees the defining characteristic of form as the power to reconcile tension and to unify the complex elements in the work of art. He offers an open theory of form in the sense that he does not specify the contents reconciled nor the organic structure by which they are unified. The New Critics have developed theories of form based on Eliot's and Richard's concepts of organic unity, maturity and complexity which are severely criticized by Hartman. Hartman's criticism of the New Critical theory of form is worth quoting in full:

It is important not to be deceived by the sophisticated vagueness of such terms as *unity, complexity, maturity, coherence* which enter criticism at this point. They are code words shored against the ruins. They express a highly neoclassical and acculturated attitude; a quiet nostalgia for the ordered life; and a secret recoil from aggressive ideologies, substitute religions, and dogmatic concepts of order. *(BF 365)*

Hartman here questions the very validity of estimating literary form in terms of the process by which the elements of the work are reconciled into unity.
He holds that criticism should specify the contents of the work which are unified and that the interest in form should not be the disguised expression of a nostalgia for an ordered social life. Richards's dependence on a theory of communication helped him to develop a concept of rhetorical transaction which ensures the reader/auditor participation. Yet even Richards has not made a successful attempt at linking a theory of form with the artist's historical consciousness.

Having critically examined four different approaches to form, Hartman proposes his own functional theory of form, which is functional and whose function is "to keep us functioning, to help us resolve certain hang-ups and bring life into harmony with itself" (BF 366). The New Critical or formalist idea that forms or structures always reconcile or unify has a conservative or debilitating effect on the writers. So Hartman advances the view that the only inspiring theory is "to create a truly iconoclastic art, a structure-breaking art; to change the function of form from reconciliation and conservation to rebellion, and so to participate in the enormity of present experience" (BF 367).

It is clear that Hartman rejects the formalistic concepts of form and is also dissatisfied with the formalist critic's lack of interest in historical consciousness. Hartman connects historical consciousness with phenomenology or "consciousness studied in its effort to 'appear'" (BF 368). As he explains, consciousness can try to objectify itself or disappear into its appearances. The dynamics of phenomenology can be inferred from the multiplicity of words it
uses—appearance, manifestation, individuation, emergence, being-in-the-world and so on. Hartman tries to combine a phenomenological view of consciousness with an iconoclastic view of a structure-free literary form.

"Structuralism: the Anglo-American Adventure" which is the opening essay in *Beyond Formalism* illustrates Hartman’s attempt to find a general theory of literature, relating art to human life. He states this aim in clear terms:

> Literary theory has been striving for exactly this: a firm and adequate conception of art in human life. The modern increase in literary criticism suggests, in fact, that art is now subject to greater expectations than ever. Since the early part of this century, and already since the Romantic period, we have turned to art in order to sustain our diminishing sense of “the communal nature” of man. (*BF* 7)

It is as part of his effort to trace the connection of literature to the communal nature of man that Hartman investigates the influence of structuralism on the Anglo-American critical scene. It shows him pursuing concerns which are inimical to Formalist criticism. Although structuralism has its origin in Russia, Switzerland and Prague, and a wide and fertile field in France, it has its own local tradition and development in Britain and America in the works of Jane Harrison, F. M. Conford, Gilbert Murray and Wilson Knight. The works of W. P. Ker and E. K. Chambers have showed that all literature with a source in oral tradition was
governed by similar conventions. But unlike its European counterpart, the Anglo-American method of structural analysis is not accompanied by an elaborate or refined theory.

Hartman points out that myths served the same function in primitive societies which classics perform in the modern society. But classics are now losing their power to be models for communal behaviour. So the myths have to be restructured and revived. Art interprets and embodies myths. In Hartman’s words, “we recover its nature by an act of historical or artistic sympathy—in short, by some sort of hermeneutic engagement” (BF 8). Structuralism is based on two related discoveries: the first that myths and art have an exemplary role in society, and the second that myths which are homologous in structure and analogous in function enable structuralism to be a central part of science humaine. Hartman refers to Gilbert Murray’s famous essay “Hamlet and Orestes” as an example of British mythical criticism which falls back on the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious. Murray explores the similarities between the Hamlet and Orestes stories and shows that the stories reveal a primal pattern which “not only reflects our racial history but remains vital to it, vital to our continued communal life” (BF 10). Murray, however, does not have a unified literary theory of the kind that Frye advances.

Wilson Knight is seen as representing an intermediate phase between Murray and Frye in the development of Anglo-American structuralist criticism.
Knight’s *Miracle and Myth* (1929) and *Wheel of Fire* (1930) developed a new method of interpreting Shakespeare which anticipated Frye’s structuralist tenets. Knight advances a holistic concept of art. According to him, we must accept the artist’s vision in its entirety which means that we must consider Shakespeare’s work as a totality and a “Progress” and every element of the work as having a primary relation to this totality. In Coleridge’s organicist postulate there is a “naïve dichotomy of mechanical versus organic,” but Knight’s organicist theory as Hartman observes, is distinguished by the fact that “the whole is greater than its parts, and that the whole is a system” (*BF* 12).

Levi-Strauss has advanced the view that myths are logical techniques to resolve the antinomies in social existence. For instance, the Oedipus myth can be interpreted as expressing the inability of a culture “to reconcile the belief in man’s autochthony with the knowledge that he is born of man and woman” (*BF* 17). As a myth involves the interpretation of a cultural dilemma Hartman holds that it is better to call myth “a hermeneutic rather than logical technique” (*BF* 17).

One of Hartman’s main aims in investigating the practice of Anglo-American structuralist criticism is to discover elements of a theory of literature more comprehensive than what the formalistic criticism encourages. Hartman holds that a theory of literature should not only distinguish between literary and nonliterary discourses, but should also illuminate the difference between literature and other forms of symbolic action such as ritual. He approves of Frazer’s
distinction between ritual and literature as one between source and derivation. For Frazer, myth is the middle term between ritual and literature. Hartman proposes that Frazer's hypothesis should be explored "in a phenomenological rather than logical (a la Frye) way" (BF 21). He insists that art evokes a sense of the hidden and has a relation with the sacred and the secular. But the relation between the sacred and the secular is not conceived of as one of naïve antinomy. Hartman emphasizes the fact that art "discovers something that corresponds on the level of society or history to the movement from esoteric to exoteric and from sacred to secular" (BF 21). Literature and myth are involved in the very nature of a central mystery.

The sustained interest that Hartman shows in the works of Frye is an index of his desire to transcend the narrowness of formalist poetics. Hartman has described Frye as "our most energetic critic" (BF 11), "our most radical demystifier of criticism" (BF 25), who has surpassed other literary thinkers in attaining a global point of view of literature. The concept of system is central to Frye's thinking. By systematizing criticism Frye tries to universalize it and to make the intellectual and spiritual tools of criticism accessible to anyone interested in it. The formalistic critic, on the other hand, has an evangelical attitude and "hold that critics have stood like priests between literature and those desiring to participate in it" (BF 26). Frye's scientism is not exclusionary and he does not seek "to overdignify criticism or scholarship" (BF 26).
Formalist criticism assumes that literature is to be used as a training ground for elite judgment. In the 1920s and 1930s English came to be established as a field of academic study. It was during this period that formalist criticism also emerged as a distinct movement, treating literature as a means for the training of judgment. Frye is concerned with offering a total and synoptic conception of literature, which excludes personalistic judgments, but is based on archetypal features and structural principles.

Frye’s interest is not in the isolated work of art or in particular cultures or traditions, but in the relation of the work to the goals of society or civilization. He writes,

No discussion of beauty can confine itself to the formal relations of the isolated work of art; it must consider, too, the participation of the work of art in the vision of the classless civilization. (Anatomy of Criticism 348)

Frye’s critical system thus moves away from the idea of a closed culture which is implicit in the exegetical practice of the New Criticism. His view that art contributes to an archetypal or total form anticipates what Hartman calls a “demystified theory of participation” (BF 29). The attempt to see art as a concrete sort of universal and the prevailing varieties of myth criticism combine with Frye’s idea of total form to create a modern literary theory which transcends the narrow concept of art as a private or elitist enterprise.
For Frye, archetypes are not hidden or mysterious; they are almost too open. Archetypal analysis brings art into the public domain. It is not certain whether the particularity of the literary work is obscured by Frye's totalizing or synoptic view. Hartman holds that the relation of the particular to an authentic concept of totality is one of the problematic issues in literary theory.

Frye's concept of the structure of a literary work is spatial, and not temporal. Wilson Knight has earlier attempted a spatial analysis of Shakespeare's works in the *Wheel of Fire*. Frye's own analysis of the works of Becket, Shakespeare or Wallace Stevens can be compared with the works of European critics such as Bachelard, Poulet and Lucien Goldmann. Frye holds with these critics that the boundary lines of particular works are to be subordinated to larger patterns. The total form of the work, according to them, cannot be expressed in literary or mythical terms as it merges with an analysis of society, consciousness and language.

Hartman appreciates the significant contribution that Frye has made to literary history through his concept of displacement. Frye has defined *displacement* as the "adaptation of myth and metaphor to canons of morality or plausibility" (*Anatomy* 136). Frye assumes that the displacement of pure myths or archetypes can be traced through history. In the first essay in the *Anatomy of Criticism* he shows how the heroes of a certain class of fiction move "from a mythic or supernatural to an ironic or all-too-human mode of being" (*BF* 36).
Hartman asserts that Frye's notion of displacement is "empirically sound" and that it "enables us to revalue what grosser histories of literature sees merely as secularization" (BF 36). Conventional literary history regards literature as the expression of a cult to be decoded only by the priest of the cult.

Hartman's observations on I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis are also worth examining here. They show that his interests are precisely in those qualities which have little to do with the basic formalistic theories of these writers. He discusses, for instance, Richards' *psychoaesthetics* that elaborates the relation of art to the life of the mind. Hartman's interest is in Richard's effort to raise "the standard of response" to art and through art to experience in general. Richards has attacked the "phantom aesthetic state" or "the separation of aesthetic from ordinary patterns of experience" (FR 20). The two pillars of Richards' system of thought are his theory of literary communication and his theory of literary value. Hartman argues that Richards's theory of value merges with his theory of communication and that this merger is consecrated or sanctioned by classical ideas of order.

Richards does not take into account the base-superstructure split envisaged by the Marxist critics or the conflict between popular art and high art envisioned by F. R. Leavis and his school. In the place of a sociological split he perceived a methodological dichotomy—that of poetry and science or the poetic and scientific uses of language. In his theory of value Richards evaded the question of the
mediation of literary authority. For Leavis, an elitist class of qualified critics or ideal readers constitute an authority capable of refining taste and training intelligence. Richards does not conceive of such an authority, but relies on improved individual response. At the same time, the model of reading Richards offers is based on "social acts of larger design" (FR 26). Hartman spells out the social significance of Richard's defense of reading:

Defense of Poetry became intertwined with a Defense of Reading, not only because of his psychological bias but also because a science of the "behaviour of words" seemed to him a social act of great, even redemptive energy. (FR 26)

Such a view of reading is clearly different from the kind of verbal explication encouraged by formalist criticism. In dealing with the criticism of T. S. Eliot, too, Hartman focuses attention on those elements which are at odds with a formalistic aesthetics. He describes Eliot as "a conservative modernist, backed by the authority of an audacious and difficult poetry" (CW 11). He also speaks of the "Neoclassical frame and concise, laconic style" (CW 10) of Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" which is concerned mainly with purifying the language than with effecting any sort of intellectual revolution. Eliot wants the poetic language to digest "a heavy fund of historical knowledge" and as a result of this conservatism he tends to distrust "ideas" that is, "excess baggage of a spiritual or intellectual kind" (CW 57). This is why in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of
Criticism” Eliot endorsed Matthew Arnold’s view that the romantic poets did not know enough, though they had plenty of energy and plenty of creative force. Eliot has added to Arnold’s list of romantic writers such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson and Browning.

Hartman holds that one special feature of the criticism of the 1960s and the 1970s is the restoration of the Romantic and nineteenth century writers into critical esteem. There has now been “a better understanding and higher evaluation” (CW 46) of the Romantic writers than was possible in the decade following Eliot’s sophisticated anti-romanticism.

Hartman’s essay “Placing F.R. Leavis” which was written in the 1980s has its focus on Leavis’s achievement as well as on the limitation of his practical mode of criticism. The essay begins with a compliment to Leavis’s “astonishing importance” in the English academic consciousness and the consistency of his career within the sphere of the English university. Hartman brings out the significance of Leavis’s hostile attitude towards “pseudoliterarcy, the herd instinct, journalism, the application of technology to learning, and unfounded hopes as to the ‘culture’ of science” (MP 111). But when he comes to Leavis’ “practical criticism” he adopts a cautionary tone. He contrasts it with Richards’ idea of the ‘practical’ which has a “utopian and scientific hope” (MP 115) and observes that Leavis’ sense of the ‘practical’ is opposed to the ‘theoretical’ and is directed always to the text. Hartman agrees with Chris Baldick’s view that Leavis replaces
his mission of social criticism with a rigid scheme for reforming literary studies. Leavis excludes social categories like class, sex, and occupation and focuses exclusively on the individual writer and the genius of the language. Hartman argues that this omission of intermediate social categories leads to a fatal simplification in Leavis' critical system.

Leavis' hostility to theory is an obvious limitation of his criticism. Apart from this, Hartman notes a certain narrowness in the range of Leavis's interests. He points out Leavis's "relative neglect of European letters" (MP 120) and his inadequate sense of the American scene in literature as evidences of this restricted interest. One persistent objection that Hartman has made to Anglo-American formalistic criticism is its indifference to the Continental literary scene and critical theory. Leavis typifies the gulf between British formalistic criticism and European critical thought.

Hartman's project to go beyond formalism is not confined to his theoretical preoccupations or to his analysis of the works of influential British or American critics. His book Beyond Formalism contains many fine and perceptive studies of poets and novelists, both Anglo-American and European, which show a mode of interpretation radically different from the explicatory method of the New Critics. His study of Blake's cyclic poems on the seasons present a remarkably original hermeneutic method. Blake's poems on the seasons appear in Poetical Sketches and belong to the period of his youthful poetic experimentation.
The poems are apparently descriptive in character and conventional in subject matter. But Hartman contends that they have a significance far greater than is suggested by their apparent ritualistic description. He proposes the point of view that they are grounded on Blake's sense of the poetical vocation and that they are more on poetry than on the seasons. Blake's "condensed lyricism" invokes the poetic spirit and recalls "poetry's higher destiny, its link to energy, liberty, and the prophetic spirit" (BF 195). In the first three odes—"To Spring," "To Summer," and "To Autumn"—there is a simple progression which moves the theme of poetry to the centre.

Having proposed that the poems are as much on the poetical spirit as on the seasons, Hartman reformulates his thesis in historical terms. He relates Blake's concern with the poetical spirit to similar concerns in Milton, Gray, Collins and Thomson. In "Lycidas" Milton has dealt with the destiny of an English poet in relation to the classics and the Bible and has linked the themes of liberty and poetry associating poetry with the spirit of prophecy. In this sense Milton anticipates Blake. Hartman, however, insists that Blake departs from Milton, as from Collins, "On the matter of the role of the classics in the Progress of the poetical spirit" (BF 198). Milton could not conceive of an English or Western poetry without the guidance of classical poets like Virgil and Horace. Blake has no such imperative faith in the classical tradition, although he does not reject classical style and its pristine vigour.
The idea of the Progress of Poesy was a specific feature of the vision of the eighteenth century poets. It expressed the belief that poetry, which originated in Greece, moved over to Rome when the Greek civilization declined, and that following the decline of Roman poetry made its way to the Western isle or England. This view of poetic history has created its own myth about history. It assumes that poetry is associated with periods of learning and that the rise of the poetic spirit heralds the rise of a new epoch. Hartman observes that Blake could have found this myth in Thomson, Gray, Collins, or Thomas Warton. Gray’s ode “Progress of Poesy,” however, has a pessimistic end, and Collins’ “Verses to Sir Thomas Hanmer” where he touches on this theme is also melancholy in tone. By the middle of the eighteenth century it was doubtful whether the greatness of English poetry might be sustained. Hartman places Blake’s poems on the progress of the poetic spirit in this historical context, shedding a new light on their visionary character and their prophetic tone.

Blake’s “To Spring” exemplifies the Westering of the Spirit. It is different from Collins’ “Ode to Evening” in that “it is a dawn and not a dusk poem” (BF 197) although both the poets draw on the same mythology of history. The emphasis is on the advent of poetry to “our Western isle,”

O thou with dewy locks, who lookest down
Through the clear windows of the morning, turn
Thine angel eyes upon our Western isle. (“To Spring”, 1-3)
Hartman draws attention to the echo in these lines of Milton's address, in "Lycidas," to his "Genius of the shore." He notes that Blake's "thine angel eyes upon our western isle" is a version of "look homeward, Angel, now." Hartman also comments on the biblical and oriental echoes in Blake's poetic style and adds brilliantly, "Blake's England awaits a dawning or second birth of that fervid—Oriental, biblical, Miltonic—imagination which his luxuriant style once more evokes" (BF 197).

The very style of "To Spring" carries the suggestion that England is the country which is now ripe to receive the poetical spirit. Hartman describes this as "the come hither motif" (BF 200) and observes that it is explicitly stated as a theme in the second of the four poems:

Our bards are fam'd who strike the silver wire:
Our youths are bolder than the southern swains;
Our maidens fairer in the sprightly dance;
We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy.

In the third of the poems Autumn sings a song to the poet's pipe which brings together the three seasons and creates an impression of the perfection of each. "To Autumn" suggests the higher dignity of the Western Muse, and yet his conception of the Muse is not a nationalistic one. In using the historical idea of the Westering of the Spirit, Blake's vision is recognizably English, yet his tracing of
the progression of the poetical spirit is also universal. Hartman explains this transforming power of Blake's genius with great critical insight:

Blake is engaged in transforming a nationalistic mythology of history into a universal topography of the imagination. He understands the Progress of Poesy as a spiritual rather than place-conditioned fact: there is progress whenever mankind recognizes that the human, the divine, and the poetical genius are one and the same. (*BF* 201)

Hartman's generalization on the nature of Blake's poetic genius proceeds from a close historical account of Blake's relationship with his poetic predecessors.

"To Winter" is the last poem of the sequence on the seasons. It stands out from the other three poems as it does not express the "come-hither motif." As man cannot humanize Winter, its spirit reverses the direction of the entire cycle of poems. Therefore Hartman admits that "To Winter" offers difficulty in interpretation. In that poem the poet is a mere figure in the landscape who desists from inviting the Genius of the North. Hartman, however, explains the incongruity by pointing out that by using two historical schemes Blake puts in doubt the historicity of both the views on the Progress of Poesy and "reinforces his thought that poetry is coterminous with man not with a region" (*BF* 203). Blake's vision contrasts with that of Thomson in "The Seasons." Thomson expresses the *genius*
loci of Northern poetry, but Blake’s interest is in the genius of poetry which surpasses places and regions.

Hartman’s hermeneutic skill is seen at its best in his historicist interpretation of Blake’s cycle of poems on the seasons. He has presented a structure of critical perceptions on Blake’s vision of the poetical spirit which compares with the best that Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom have written on the subject. It shows how far he has gone beyond the methods and concerns of formalistic criticism in one of his most successful and original critical studies.

Another essay which illustrates the unconventional range of Hartman’s interests is “The Poets’ Politics” in which he comments on the political implications in the works of a number of poets from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Yeats and Robert Lowell. He starts with the assumption that ours is a political age and that poetry has to defend itself in such an age. Poetry has to be defended by stressing Shelley’s intuition that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. It would mean that poets address the entire human condition and not some isolated element in it. A purely ideological poetry, however, will not survive the social or political condition which has produced it.

Hartman proposes that the relation between poetry and politics can be understood only by recognizing the interdependence between great art and popular art. The English poets of the Renaissance drew on popular sources such as legends, folk-tales, superstitions and romances. Hartman mentions Chaucer as the
first and clearest example, and Shakespeare as the next. Even Spenser and Milton made use of the popular elements in their poetry, so that their sublimity remains "a vernacular sublime."

Wordsworth admired and drew inspiration from Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of popular ballads and songs mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Popular tales and political satires were widely read in Wordsworth’s day. Wordsworth dealt with political subjects indirectly but their effect was quite remarkable. Hartman refers to Wordsworth’s poem “Old Man Travelling” as an instance of this. The poem does not begin with a public or political event, but with an ordinary sight which seems to have no connection with politics or the large movement of history. It describes an old man who travels on, with an expression of settled quietness and perfect peace. The poet asked him where he was going and what the object of his journey was. To this he replied:

"Sir, I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital—"

There is a mystery in the settled quiet and perfect peace of the old man in the context of the unnatural death of his young son. Hartman explains the mystery by illuminating the political allusion in the line “Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth.” Wordsworth lived in the era of the French Revolution and
the Napoleonic wars. The dying son at Falmouth is a victim of the Napoleonic wars. The old man represents a slow-changing agrarian civilization in tune with nature, whereas the dying represents the fast-moving forces of history. Wordsworth's poem expresses the consciousness of a contrast between political generations. As Hartman perceptively puts it, "we are again, as in Yeats, caught between two worlds, or standing at a fatal crossroads in the development of humanity" (BF 253). "Old Man Travelling" illustrates how Wordsworth has grasped the essential political crisis of his time and has expressed it in his poetry by means of a few masterful images.

In W.B. Yeats the treatment of the political theme is more obvious and forceful than in Wordsworth. He made use of the popular sources of art throughout his career. In the poem "Coole and Ballylee" he describes himself as one of the last Romantics:

We were the last romantics—chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people.

As a last romantic, Yeats dealt with Romantic Ireland, its legends and ballads and the interaction of private and public passions. But his attitude to public events and personalities is far from being simple. Hartman points out that although "September 13" begins with an exaltation of O'Leary and other Irish militants, as
the poem proceeds their great deeds are questioned as “that delirium of the brave.”

The last verses convey the impression that it was delirium and “not a magnanimous passion for rem publicam but a carelessness for their own lives growing out of frustrated love” (BF 250).

“Easter 1916” which is imbued with the spirit of self-questioning expresses the poet’s view that Romantic Ireland is not dead, and that a new and terrible Romanticism is born. It is terrible not because it generates rebellion and violence, but because it presents a degenerate ethos. Hartman observes that for Yeats “magnanimity is all.” “Easter 1916” conveys the poet’s persistent impression that politics narrows the souls and militates against magnanimity. The woman in the poem spent “her nights in argument/Until her voice grew shrill.” One of the rebels is “A drunken, vainglorious lout.” All their hearts “with one purpose alone” seemed “enchanted to a stone.” Their fixed obsession with a single purpose made them “trouble the living stream” and sin against nature. The result of their death and the failed rebellion is that “We know their dream,” and the dream disturbs the poet’s consciousness and weighs on our mind.

Hartman mentions “A Prayer for my Daughter” as a poem with clear political implications. In this poem Yeats tries to face the new era born of the failed dream and its “terrible beauty.” The poet describes the outbreak of a storm, coming out of the “murderous innocence” of the sea. Hartman regards “murderous innocence” as a condensed expression which suggests “both the impersonality of
fate, of historical evolution, and the terrible beauty of historical revolution" (BF 251). He further notes that in “A Prayer for my Daughter” Yeats “reasserts his older ideal of magnanimity, which excludes intellectual hatred and soul-narrowing politics” (BF 251). The poet prays that his daughter might not be affected by the era of terrible beauty. His natural hopes for her are set over against the unregenerate and restrictive values of the new era:

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony’s a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading Laurel tree.

(77-80)

Hartman’s commentary on Yeats’ poetry offers new insights into the way in which poetic imagination is shaped by political thoughts and events.

In the poetry of Robert Lowell Hartman finds “not only the realm of direct political poetry but also that of masterful images” (BF 254). He takes up for analysis Lowell’s poem “For the Union Dead” in which “each stanza flashes an aggressive picture onto the screen of the mind” (BF 254). The images are rather strange, but strong, and discontinuous:

The old South Boston Aquarium stands
In a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are boarded.
The bronze weathervane cod has lost half its scales.
The airy tanks are dry.

Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass;

my hand tingled

to burst the bubbles

drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.

Hartman comments that in this poem all things try to occupy the same place:

The personal past, the personal present, the historical past, the historical present, space relations, and time relations—all these come “nearer,” mass like storm clouds on our sight. (BF 255)

The images in each stanza possess the characteristics of emblems. They are infected by the crudity of pop art. The poet’s mind cannot escape the infection of the age, and that is where the political element comes in most clearly. To quote Hartman again, “Lowell’s poem intensifies our sense of inverted values, disorder and crisis. It expresses the situated individual who confronts all this not only out there but also in himself” (BF 255).

The last poem Hartman analyzes in the essay “The Poet’s Politics” is Stevens’ “The Snowman” which presents a perspective on life and nature different from that of Lowell’s “For the Union Dead.” It aims at purging consciousness in the very act of perception. It is the kind of poetry which does not wish to become
thought or afterthought. It states that to see winter one must have a mind of winter, a mind which does not attribute "meanings" or fictions to the winter:

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun

To perceive winter we should not impose our own consciousness on it or see it through our own self-image. We have to see nature for what it is and not in the way we like it to be. The poem thus conveys an intuition about a basic dilemma in our mode of perceiving nature. We must stop bringing our own ideas and anxieties into our perception of nature. Hartman observes that this dilemma can be resolved to some extent through the politics of poetry:

What man has made of man and what man has made of nature are intimately joined, yet through the politics of poetry we may still open a chink in this claustrophobic mind and see "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." (BF 257)
Unlike the Marxist or neo-Marxist critics Hartman does not raise or explore the ideological issues involved in the question of the relation between poetry and politics. His study does not proceed at the theoretical level, but is concerned with a close analysis of selected poems. By analyzing the vision, structure, imagery and symbolism of these poems Hartman demonstrates how some of the most distinguished British and American poets have responded to the entire human condition. Their response is political in the most significant sense of that term.

"Poem and Ideology: A Study of Keats' ‘To Autumn’" is another critical essay that shows Hartman's method of commenting in detail on a poem's vision and structure, without depending on the formalistic mode of explication. In fact Hartman explicitly states that the formalistic terms “cannot suffice for Keats any more than for Wordsworth” (FR 144). He approaches Keats' poem from a wider perspective than that of the New Critics. At the same time his use of the term "ideology" is more restricted than that of the Marxists who think of ideology “as a set of ideas that claim universality while serving a materialistic or class interest” (FR 125). Hartman's main argument in “To Autumn” is that it overcomes the epiphanic consciousness essential to the traditional type of the sublime poem. Keats' other odes are marked by a moment of illusion followed by disillusion. There is no such decisive turn or epiphany in “To Autumn.” The ode unfolds as “widening speculation” rather than as a nature-poem or a secularized hymn.
Hartman points out that romance and epic which are marked by the high visionary style reveal an epiphanic structuring of consciousness, and is primarily associated with the East. But the nonepiphanic structuring which Keats has developed in “To Autumn” is associated with the West or Hesperia. As Hartman puts it, the distinction is not between two types of consciousness, but between two types of structuring:

It is possible to treat this distinction formally as one between two types of structuring rather than two types of consciousness. Eventually, however, Keats’ charge of superstition or obsolescence against the earlier mode will move us into ideology and beyond formalism. (BF 135)

Keats’ observation, “Life to him [Milton] would be death to me” refers to more than a matter of difference in poetic style; it has deeper ideological implications. The nonepiphanic form of “To Autumn” shows that the movement of the whole poem is inspired by “a progressive idea with Enlightenment roots” (FR 143). In Keats’ letters there are several key phrases suggesting the idea of “enlightenment,” of “widening speculation,” of “the regular stepping of Imagination toward a Truth,” and of easing the “Burden of Mystery.” It is evident that Hartman’s interpretation of “To Autumn” is guided by Keats’ ideas and by the course of poetic history. He uses the term ideology in a restricted or special sense
but it serves to show that “To Autumn” which is one of the most pictorial of Keats’s poems has an intellectual impulse and direction behind it.

“Hopkins Revisited” is another significant critical essay of Hartman in which he expresses his dissatisfaction with the New Critical approach. He comments on the present state of Hopkins criticism, “After almost fifty years of close reading and superb editing, Hopkins’s verse remains something of a scandal” (BF 231). He adds that most of Hopkins’s poems have cruxes (like “Buckle” in “The Windhover”) “that defeat exegetical activity” and that the existing exegeses are not definitive enough. Hartman contends that the residue of obscurity in his poem arises not from Romantic individualism, but from an uneasy blend of natural and learned elements. It is the result of Hopkins’s desire for an impersonal and esoteric discipline which came from his Catholic training.

The relation between the religious impulse and the poetical impulse was very strong in Hopkins. Hartman comments that in Hopkins “precariousness is a religious quality that becomes a poetic quality” (BF 234). In “The Windhover” the first sighting of the bird is an act of sensory perception. Yet to see things so strongly shows an exceptionally trained power of identification. The meditational technique of Ignatius Loyola which Hopkins practised as a Jesuit priest adapts the mimetic principle to the life of Christ. It gives the utmost importance to the idea of imitation or miming. Hartman observes that a similar impulse to imitation is central in “The Wreck of the Deutschland” which marks the beginning of
Hopkins's sacred poetry: "It is felt in the style, in the ritual crying of thoughts, and in passages of unusual rhythmic mimicry" (BF 236). A related quality of Hopkins's style is that it is as "vocative" as possible. Hartman says that this holds for sound, grammar, figures of speech, and actual performance.

Hopkins has, in passing, used the term contentio or strain of address. Hartman says that this phrase best describes Hopkins's own strain of address and that its pervasive use accounts for the innovative quality of his poetic style:

And by such stress and strain of address, maintained until all parts of speech, all figures, seem to partake in the vocative, Hopkins revolutionized poetic style. (B.F. 238)

It is only natural that Hopkins should have disapproved of the neutral or Parnassian style developed by Tennyson. Hartman quotes Hopkins's words, "A horrible thing has occurred to me. I have begun to doubt Tennyson" (BF 238). Hopkins gets rid of the Parnassian style by concentrating on the verbal matter and pushing it into the foreground. Words in Hopkins's poetry reclaim their "inscape" or their immediate power of address. His mannerisms appear linguistic rather than rhetorical in nature. So a rhetorical analysis cannot yield the power of his poetry. Hartman suggests that a diacritical analysis works effectively "on the basis of homophones to show how linguistic individuation occurs" (BF 240). The diacritical method also applies to the problem of Hopkins's sprung rhythm.
Hopkins mentions “Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves” as a poem exemplifying the diacritical tendency. Similarly he refers to “Felix Randall” as showing “what may be achieved when the vocations of the poet and priest unite.” (BF 243)

Hartman compares Hopkins with Browning and Crashaw and finds that he surpasses both of them in one respect. His imagination is directly and substantially engaged with the elemental world of the senses, and the materiality of language. As Hartman puts it with characteristic precision, “Language through him, is again part of the body of things, if not its very quintessence” (BF 244). Crashaw’s style is marked by wit, paradox and point. Hopkins revived the pointed style in the lyrics, and he is consciously English whereas Crashaw is catholic or universal.

Comparing Hopkins with Browning, Hartman says that each poet introduces “a new density of diction and structure into the lyric” (BF 244). Browning does it by means of his dramatic method, by speaking through characters who are caught up in a crucial situation in their life. But Hopkins appears to develop his lyric structure “out of the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision” (BF 244) and Pindar’s truly athletic conception of poetry.

Hartman’s illuminating commentary on Hopkins’s poetry—on its intrinsic quality as well as on its relation to the works of other poets—is quite unlike what the New Critics have to offer.
Beyond Formalism contains critical studies of British and European novelists such as Virginia Woolf, Maurice Blanchot, Albert Camus and Andre Malraux. These studies reveal new insights and unconventional points of view and show how different Hartman’s position is from that of the formalistic critics. In the essay “Virginia’s Web” Hartman traces a line of development from the realism of The Voyage Out to the expressionism of Between the Acts, passing through an experimental period, containing Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando and The Waves. The distinction of Mrs. Woolf’s fiction lies in this “shuttling between realistic and expressionistic forms of style” (BF 80). She tried to express the spirit of affirmation in its full extent. Her simple and illusionistic realism creates a world which Hartman calls “nature,” which means “a continuous yet relatively impersonal principle of life” (BF 80) that occasionally assumes a human shape.

The plot in Woolf’s novels is realistic, but nearly everything of importance happens between the acts. This expansion of the interval, of “the mind-space” is a distinguishing feature of Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse.

Even in The Waves plot is fairly clear, but here everything is interpolation. The characters are represented by their speeches, and it is through the speeches that make things happen. The human beings appear as “a supreme interpolation standing against the impersonal roll of time” (BF 81). Hartman further stresses the element of continuity in Woolf’s fiction. She presupposes a mind which has immense power to see or build continuities. For instance, in reading Mrs. Dalloway our chief interest is neither in the plot nor in the prose style, but in the
suspense we feel; and this suspense is a matter of some line of continuity that is preserved in the novel. Virginia Woolf achieves this continuity by going beyond the consciousness of the character Clarissa.

Hartman argues that just as the plot has some kind of continuity, so the prose style too represents continuity. He refers to the scene where Clarissa is waiting to cross the street, and then crosses it. This has elements of a plot in it. The thoughts that pass through her mind while crossing the street form another kind of continuity. Hartman comments on the tension that results from the two modes of continuity:

A tension is thus produced between the realistic plot and the expressive prose; the latter tends to veil or absorb the former, and the former suggests a more natural continuity, one less dependent on the mind. (BF 76)

The continuities represented by “plot” and “prose” are related to each other. Hartman says that they stand to each other dialectically as major types of affirmation, the plot line coinciding mostly with what we call nature, and the prose line intimating something precarious but also perhaps greater—the “Nature that exists in works of mighty Poets.” (BF 76-77)
What Woolf asserts is life, and not her personal will. She is more interested in the life of the mind than in life as such and so she leaves her thoughts free. The freedom of the mind is much more important to her than illusionistic realism. In Mrs. Dalloway, it is the power of prose that moves people together and apart, entering different minds at will.

Between the Acts which is Woolf’s last novel also expresses the same desire for continuity as Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. Here, in the transition of plot and scenes she does not use realism. The continuities that Woolf discovers lie both in nature and in the artist, and help to hold her words together. Hartman states clearly the relation between realism and expressionistic continuity in Woolf’s works:

Virginia Woolf’s use of a realistic plot and an expressionistic continuity seems as deep a solution to the structural problems of prose fiction as that found in Ulysses. Though the form cannot be said to originate with her, she gave it a conscious and personal perfection, and it remains a vital compromise with the demands of realism. (BF 84)

Hartman’s study of Virginia Woolf’s novels is perhaps not comprehensive enough, but it introduces a new perspective based on a conception of the dialectical relation between realism and expressionistic continuity in her works.
The question of realism in modern fiction is the subject of Hartman’s essay “The Heroics of Realism.” He begins by quoting Virginia Woolf’s statement that “everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought” (BF 61) and points out that the chief problem for the modern novelists is how to impose form on contemporary experience. Realism becomes dogmatic when it assumes that a direct contact with life is always available and that forms are therefore a betrayal of life. Ideally, the modern novelist finds himself under an obligation to respond to the totality of experience. But form restricts the focus. The sanction for forms rests with the artist, and not with social or religious imperatives of any kind. We hold the artist responsible for whatever form he uses whether it is taken from society or invented by him. Hartman emphasizes the fact that ancient as well as modern art has the power of sympathetic trespass, “trespass against the society circumscribing the artist’s range of feeling” (BF 62). In modern novelists this trespass co-exists with a wider range of experience than in the novelists of the past.

Although the novelists before the present era generally used omniscient narration they were restrained by social norms which affected their sensibility and their craft of writing. Hartman mentions Jane Austen’s Persuasion as a novel which exemplifies the older kind of restraint. Jane Austen depicts the reconciliation of two estranged lovers only after keeping them in tense separation for a sufficiently long time. Jane Austen creates the images of slow redemption which accounts for the power of her art. As the example of a contemporary novel
which deals with estrangement and reconciliation Hartman takes up for analysis Malamud’s *The Assistant*. In this novel Frank, an Italian, rapes the Jewish girl Helen; but from this hopeless distance and deep estrangement he is finally able to win the “Jewish” and “human” Helen and to redeem what has been lost.

Even those novelists who work entirely within the tradition of realism estrange us from the intimacy of its mode. Hartman maintains that Malamud’s Frank, although not a picaresque hero, “belongs to the archetype of the stranger” (*BF* 65). The novelist’s trespass is now against realism itself. In realistic novels Hartman finds “a vital antithesis of mode and work” so that “the author tends to beget otherness rather than intimacy, vision rather than common sense” (*BF* 65). This is illustrated by the classic case of Balzac whose realism is deeply visionary.

Faulkner and Robbe-Grillet made use of the technique of “estranged consciousness.” In France, the Surrealist movement also began to explore the technique of estrangement. In the modern realistic novel a genuine sense of difference or otherness is quite evident. It is manifest in the mythic dimension of certain characters in the realistic novels. In novels of impersonal narration the author intrudes as little as possible and therefore it is difficult to know how the author judges his characters, or in what relation of judgment the reader stands to the characters. In his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* Wayne C. Booth has used the phrase “confusion of distance” (311) to describe this flaw. Booth holds that this “confusion of distance” is the result of the impersonal mode of narration. Hartman
argues that heroic characters do not ask to be judged either by their authors or by the readers. In their mode of being they stand beyond good and evil. Lear, Macbeth, Stephen Daedalus and Felix Krull are such characters.

Hartman proposes that modern realistic fiction is linked to romance and myth and to characters whose identity is not merely moral or psychological. In Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin’s character, that is, his moral and psychological entity, is only vaguely drawn, but his mode of being or ontological entity is transparently presented. So he is human in every respect except for his pity which makes him “divine and disastrous, like Christ” (*BF* 68).

Stephen Daedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait* is a different kind of character from Prince Myshkin. Yet he is also a hero who rejects all existential choices towards the end of the novel except that of being an artist. He discards family, priesthood and patriotism and goes into exile on his own accord to pursue an artist’s vocation. His destiny lifts him beyond our final judgment. Yet like Dimitri in *Brothers Karamazov*, Stephen is quite self-critical. Hartman finds that the greatest challenge of the modern realistic novel is how to save the familiar world from familiarity. He suggests that the author, “staying within realism, must keep from too easy an intimacy with creation” (*BF* 70).

In his essay “Camus and Malraux: the Common Ground” Hartman examines another theme of modern fiction—that of resistance. He emphasizes the fact that in the hands of both Malraux and Camus fiction became an act of
resistance, and not an act of judgment. Malraux's novel *Days of Contempt* explores the sources of resistance, and also of complicity. Camus adapted *Days of Contempt* into a play and thereby showed his active interest in the literature of resistance. Hartman describes Camus's works as "a critique of communion, of which the major types are religion, politics, sexuality, work, and speech (art)" (*BF* 87). According to Camus the emphasis of Christianity on the unity of man, on a universal communion produces its opposite—the tyranny of totalitarian attitudes. In politics, the actual menace of totalitarianism was clear from the Moscow "confessions" of 1936 and the rapid rise of Hitler to power in Germany. The great nineteenth century writers such as Baudalire, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky have anticipated these historical facts and the tyrannies of the new antireligious modes of communion.

Like Malraux, Camus rejected the view that historical fact is absolute. He showed that revolution is not the result of objective or historical necessity, but is caused as much by a definite metaphysical anguish as by a specific political motive. To try to solve a metaphysical problem by political means is to resort to Inquisition and to substitute totality for unity. Hartman points out that with history against them, both Malraux and Camus "rely on art for an image of man's inviolability" (*BF* 90).

Camus upholds a philosophy of indifference in matters of religion, and shows that politics is a passion, a transferred religion. Hartman argues that the
notion of indifference is central to an interpretation of The Stranger, Caligula and The Plague. In The Stranger Meursault achieves an understanding of his life and the importance of detachment just before his death. Consequently he rejects the priest. The theme of indifference is pursued further in Caligula and The Plague. In the former, Caligula encounters the world with the indifference which it shows towards him. In The Plague the characters assume their life by the quality of their indifference as well as by the strength of their compassion.

Hartman does not attempt a detailed exposition of the works of Camus, but he does offer suggestions and clues which facilitate a fresh understanding of Camus. His essay “Maurice Blanchot: Philosopher Novelist” is as remarkable as the essay on Malraux and Camus in its attempt to come to terms with a problematic theme. Blanchot’s theme is the self-estrangement of consciousness and the relation of art or the literary activity to consciousness itself. According to Blanchot, art is consciousness in search of an unselfconscious form. For him a novel is a space for revealing a mystery and it is difficult to say what parts of the novel reflect the real world and what parts are imaginary. Realistic novels depict a physical setting. Blanchot attempts to present a physical setting, but his attempts prove to be futile. His novels are “irrealistic,” creating a void:

But all his novels create a void rather than a world, an escape litteraire as ontologically equivocal as mind itself and which neither reader, author, nor characters can cross to reach Being. What Ortega
Gasset said of Proust can be applied, with a slight though important change, to Blanchot: “He stands as the inventor of a new distance between symbols and ourselves.” (BF 100)

Blanchot uses every fictional device to create this distance between symbols and ourselves, and thereby destroys the very realism from which the work of art springs. Whereas Balzac’s novels add up to a world of solid reality, Blanchot is more interested in the personality of the words, in their power to veil and reveal than in the personality of his characters. His characters are literally outsiders to themselves. Even when they exist in the medium of art they are shown not as alive but rather as deathless. They endure “an endless purgatorial state” (BF 105), unable to be born or reborn into life. It is a state of death-in-life which can be identified with the alienated consciousness. These characters are alienated from life within life and the milieu in which they look for death or death-in-life is related, as Hartman puts it, “to purgatory, the Waste Land, the T. B. Mountain, and the House of the Dead” (BF 107-108).

Hartman is here relating Blanchot to a literary tradition involving Goethe, Dostoevsky and Kafka. An equally important contribution of Hartman in interpreting Blanchot is his effort to link the novelist philosophically to Heidegger, Hegel and Kierkegaard. Hartman observes that Blanchot’s idea of forgetfulness harmonizes with what Heidegger calls “the mystery of oblivion,” and adds that, quite possibly,
Blanchot assimilates Heidegger through the perspective of a common literary tradition reaching from the German Romantics to the French Symbolists and Rilke. (BF’97)

Blanchot’s connection with Hegelian thought is more elaborately dealt with. Hegel believes that the mind suffers self-estrangement. But he also believes that this self-estrangement can be overcome by rational or philosophical means. He regards art as the product of phenomenological, and not philosophical, imagination. Blanchot accepts the Hegelian view that art is an exile form of consciousness, but argues that art must “work against the grain of history” and that it is “inherently a project of self-alienation” (BF 104).

Blanchot’s link with Kierkegaard is of a direct kind. His characters who are sick unto death are like Kierkegaard’s despairing men. But these characters have lost the ability to die. Their sickness springs from their consciousness. As Hartman succinctly puts it, Blanchot believes that art is “not consciousness per se, but rather its antidote, evolved from within consciousness itself” (BF 109). It is this philosophical quest for unselfconsciousness that distinguishes Blanchot’s novels from that of his contemporaries.

Most of the essays examined in this chapter were written between 1958-1970 when Hartman was in his mid-career as a critic. They express Hartman’s dissatisfaction with the theoretical narrowness and the pedagogical character of formalistic criticism. They share the anti-formalist spirit of the American
revisionist criticism which was gathering strength in the sixties. Hartman’s critical studies of poets and novelists from Milton to Wallace Stevens and from Virginia Woolf to Maurice Blanchot show a broad range of approaches which can be variously termed as historicist, intertextual, and phenomenological. Hartman’s primary interest, however, is in interpretation, in the vital act of hermeneutics. His studies of Blake, Yeats, Virginia Woolf and Blanchot take their place in modern criticism as brilliant and original examples of sustained hermeneutic practice.