The social reorganisation of the way in which knowledge was produced and underwritten that took place from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards led to the professionalisation of science with ‘scientists’ who became the custodians of specialised knowledge organised as academic disciplines within the framework of the new knowledge-producing European university. Towards the end of the century the sciences were joined by those disciplines that came to be organised under the banner ‘social sciences’ and, ultimately, also by those disciplines that came to be known as the humanities, i.e. those four groups of disciplines which R. S. Crane has called the ‘good arts’:

Linguistics, the analysis of ideas, literary and artistic criticism, and historiography – these are the four constituent elements of the humanities when the humanities are defined in terms of the ‘good arts’ which their successful cultivation presupposes.

Within this framework of the new research university the natural sciences set the standards for what was to count as knowledge and how such knowledge was to be validated, and they consequently became the paradigm for what an academic discipline should be. It is easy to understand and illustrate the claim that scientific knowledge is cumulative and progressive, that the various natural sciences develop progressively better and more general theories dealing with the slice of reality that they study, and thus approach closer and closer to the truth about our micro and macro universe. However, this view of knowledge and of the function of the university presents a problem for the humanities. In the words of Crane, and I do not think that Crane’s formulation of this has been bettered, the humanities characteristically deal with

all those things which, because not all men or all groups of men can, or do, do them, are therefore not amenable to adequate explanation in terms of general laws of natural processes, physical or biological, or in terms of collective social conditions or forces. They are the things which we cannot predict, in any
scientific way, that men individually or in groups will do, but which, when
they are done, we recognize as signs, not of any natural or social necessities,
but of possibilities inherent in man’s peculiar nature.\(^3\)

The humanities deal with those areas of human experience that are not
amenable to scientific treatment. Thus arose the problem that has haunted the
humanities as academic disciplines ever since: how to attain intellectual
authority in a society where the source of intellectual authority is institu-
tionalised research defined by disciplinary protocols and disciplinary matrices.

This problem was particularly severe for what one may call the aesthetic
disciplines, i.e. those disciplines the core of which was ‘literary and artistic
criticism’. The modern academic disciplines of both linguistics and history
could build on long traditions which constituted ‘disciplines of thought’. These
could be developed into disciplines of knowledge in a way which made the notion of knowledge in these disciplines recognisably similar to
the notion of knowledge applied in the hard sciences. Linguistics developed
out of historical and comparative philology. This, in its turn, developed out
of the comparative study of Greek and Latin that arose in the Renaissance
when it was discovered that classical Latin was different from medieval
Latin. The study of Greek and Latin became part of the humanistic
education of Europe, and Greek and Latin were taught in schools. That
involved the writing of grammars classifying the different word forms and
the different sounds of a language. Philology thus had an object of study
(texts of different languages from different periods). It developed a system
of classification, i.e. conceptual apparatus for describing linguistic forms
and sounds; it developed methods for comparing different stages in the
development of a language as well as for comparing different languages.
These methods and the classificatory system were teachable and produced
testable knowledge. And it developed a theory of linguistic change which
enabled philologists successfully to formulate laws of linguistic change.\(^4\)
Indeed, The philological seminarius, or seminar, in which students met to
train in methods under a master, the professor, became a model for other
disciplines’.\(^5\)

The academic discipline of history, too, developed out of a long tradition
of writing narratives about the past, a tradition in which it is possible to
identify ‘the fundamentals to which all historians of all ages have
subscribed’.\(^6\) The academic discipline of history can be seen as continuous
with and as representing the same sort of activity as ‘history as a functional
social activity’ that ‘stretches back to the beginning of human society’.\(^7\)
Historians since Herodotus and Thucydides have been concerned to offer
accounts of the past that make up a factually accurate narrative.
On the whole, however, the conclusions I have drawn from the proofs quoted may, I believe, safely be relied on. Assuredly they will not be disturbed either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggeration of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers that are attractive at truth’s expense; the subjects they treat of being out of the reach of evidence, and time having robbed most of them of historical value by enthroning them in the region of legend. Turning from these, we can rest satisfied with having proceeded upon the clearest data, and having arrived at conclusions as exact as can be expected in matters of such antiquity.  

It is this concern with narrative accuracy that gives historiography its unity, imposing as it does a set of constraints that has the potential of being turned into a disciplinary protocol. The development of the understanding of these constraints can be revealed in a history of historiography even though it is only at a very late stage that the constraints become formalised in such a way as to define a disciplinary matrix. ‘For history in the final sense, history as a scholarly discipline, begins only with Ranke and his German compatriots at the beginning of the nineteenth century.’ Ranke’s achievement was to combine fully in his work the methodological achievements of philologists, erudites, and legal historians with substantial interpretation and traditional narrative history.

Applying the methods ‘of philologists, erudites, and legal historians’ to documentary sources, Ranke aimed to construct an account of ‘how [the past] actually was’ (‘wie es eigentlich gewesen’). Furthermore, Ranke turned historiography into a teachable and examinable discipline:

In addition, Ranke innovated when he taught young historians in his seminar how to apply the proper methods in their research. Gatterer had experimented briefly with a seminar in Göttingen, yet only Ranke put the seminar into the center of the education of historians. The young historians were sent to the archives, which just at that time began to open routinely their doors to scholars. The use of these sources under sophisticated critical safeguards seemed to guarantee the objectivity of one segment of the historian’s work, the establishment of facts.
build. A definition of literary criticism in a well known ‘dictionary of literary terms’, a kind of book that came into being only when literary criticism had become a presumably specialised discipline that required a handbook even to understand the language used by that discipline, defines literary criticism as

The description, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works. The presentation of principles and theories underlying such works, and the application of these or other considerations to the judgment of such works and their discrimination.\(^\text{12}\)

In the academic discipline of literary criticism description and interpretation are not only central but foundational since the critic identifies his object of study through these activities. Without description and interpretation there is nothing on which to ground ‘principles and theories’ or to which one can apply these principles and theories in order to form a judgement. Description and interpretation are epistemically prior to the formulation of principles and theories. However, the plethora of comments on single works and authors that have been made and written down since the beginning of the Western literary tradition do not form a coherent tradition of description and interpretation of literary works defined by a set of constraints and conventions which could be developed into a disciplinary protocol for an academic discipline of literary studies.\(^\text{13}\) Only at the end of the eighteenth century do critics start to describe and interpret literary works in a way that anticipates critical interpretation as it occurs within literary studies. The kind of interpretation that then develops is psychological character-interpretation rooted in Romantic doctrine about the importance of the inner life: literary characters are interpreted as real people.\(^\text{14}\) Paradigms of such interpretation are the interpretations of the character of Hamlet given by Schlegel and Coleridge.\(^\text{15}\) A step on the way to the description and interpretation one finds in literary studies, these interpretations are founded in general theories of human nature and it is these theories that provide the constraints for such interpretations:

[Mr Coleridge] has shewn that the intricacies of Hamlet’s character may be traced to Shakespeare’s deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. That this character must have some common connection with the laws of our nature, was assumed by the lecturer from the fact that Hamlet was the darling of every country where literature was fostered. He thought it essential to the understanding of Hamlet’s character that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds.\(^\text{16}\)
This kind of interpretation ignores, for example, literary convention and precedent. Coleridge interpreted Hamlet’s refusal to kill the king because he was at prayer and secure from damnation merely as a proof that Hamlet was unwilling to act, without taking into consideration contemporary literary analogies to Hamlet’s refusal. Thus this kind of interpretation obeys conventions different from those defining the type of description and interpretation practised in literary studies.

There are good reasons why there was no coherent tradition of description and interpretation on which literary studies could build a disciplinary protocol. Description and interpretation have to serve a purpose. They are necessary only when a text become ‘dark’, when epistemic access is no more automatic for the ‘common reader’. There did exist a ‘tribe of Scholiasts, Commentators, and Explainers’ that ‘emerged even in antiquity, as a result of time itself: because of changes in language and customs, old texts grew dark’. However, these did not provide description and interpretation of the kind referred to in the above quoted modern definition of literary criticism. When James Harris, from whom the above phrase is lifted, in 1752 published _Upon the Rise and Progress of Criticism_ he divided criticism into three types: ‘philosophical’, ‘historical’, and ‘corrective’. The ‘tribe of Scholiasts, Commentators, and Explainers’ he put into the second category together with ‘“the Compilers of Lexicons and Dictionaries” (most notably Johnson), “Authors upon Grammar”, “Writers of Philological Epistles”, and “Writers of Library Catalogues” (works such as Johnson’s on the Harleian library), as well as translators, whose work is also “a Species of Explanation”’. Harris’s two fundamental principles for ‘historical’ criticism were that

> concern for individual authors and texts takes place within the context of a tradition of critical theory (of ‘philosophical’ criticism), and that within this tradition the interpretation and evaluation of individual works are matters of scholarship, acts of ‘historical’ criticism.

By ‘corrective criticism’, says Patey,

> Harris means what we call textual criticism. Its main instrument is ‘collation’; it may equally be called ‘authoritative’ criticism (it yields us authors). Its abuse is ‘Conjecture’, wherein the editor – Harris cites Bentley’s Milton – indulges in ‘intemperate excess’, not restoring his author but vaingloriously giving ‘a testimony to the Editor and his Art’.

Harris’s work indicates that at this time (the middle of the eighteenth century) the literary text was not in itself regarded as epistemically
problematic. Neither his ‘philosophical’ nor his ‘historical’ criticism was interpretive. Indeed, literary texts became epistemically problematic only when the educated reading public could no longer appreciate literary works because they simply did not know how to read.

The absence of a coherent practice of description and interpretation may explain why histories of literary criticism from George Saintsbury’s *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (3 volumes, 1900–1904) onwards have focused on theories and principles and bypassed in silence the incoherent mass of judgements and comments on individual authors (of the type collected in the *Critical Heritage* series) except where such comments have been made ‘within the context of a tradition of critical theory’ and can be used to exemplify that type of ‘critical theory’. In his introduction to *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* J. W. T. Atkins recognises that ‘Criticism is ... an activity of a many-sided kind; it may consist of theorising or judging, legislating or appreciating’, but, he says, it is ‘with “the preliminaries of criticism” that we shall be for the most part concerned, with inquiries into the nature and art of poetry and into matters of prose style’. And in his Preface to the first volume of his eight-volume *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*, René Wellek says that

> The term ‘criticism’ I shall interpret broadly to mean not only judgments of individual books and authors, ‘judicial’ criticism, practical criticism, evidences of literary taste, but *mainly* what has been thought about the principles and theory of literature, its nature, its creation, its function, its effects, its relations to the other activities of man, its kinds, devices, and techniques, its origins and history.

Wellek is critical of Saintsbury’s *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* for not being sufficiently ‘theoretical’. Such histories continue to ignore ‘practical’ criticism even for those recent periods when there is at least an apparent practice of description and interpretation. In *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* only volume 7, on *Modernism and the New Criticism*, deals in some detail with actual critics, but again they are critics who represent a theoretical stance. Of the subsequent volumes, volume 8 deals with structuralism, poststructuralism, Russian formalism, semiotics, narratology, hermeneutics, phenomenology, reception theory and speech-act theories; and volume 9 with modern psychological, philosophical and historical perspectives. In the absence of a systematic and coherent practice to describe, histories of criticism became, and have remained, histories of poetics.

The history of poetics can be written as a history of ideas and need not, indeed cannot, be written as the history of a practice. For poetics, like
criticism itself, does not present itself as a systematic and coherent discourse practice with practitioners responding to each other. In addition to Plato’s pronouncements and strictures on poetry in various dialogues, and Aristotle’s Poetics, Horace’s Ars Poetica and Pseudo-Longinus’s Peri hupsos (On Sublimity) were the outstandingly influential works in antiquity. These four authors define the problems and concerns that have dominated reflections on literature up to the present day: the nature of the literary work itself and the relative role of style, structure, and ideas or thought within the work; the nature of the relationship between the work and the world, between the work and its creator, and between the work and the reader’s emotions; the instrumental value (positive or negative) of literature. However, Ars Poetica and Peri hupsos had a special impact on the way in which poetics was written and became established as a special kind of discourse different from, for example, philosophy. Neither Horace nor Longinus writes as a philosopher; each writes, rather, as an adviser to poets or as a connoisseur of the art. They propound general principles, but they do not do so systematically, nor do they support these principles by argument. And criticism was never to enter the realm of philosophy again. The works that constitute the tradition of poetics from the Renaissance onwards do not constitute a coherent discipline, or even a coherent and continuous type of discourse. The important documents of criticism from the Renaissance to the middle of the nineteenth century were sometimes systematic ‘scientific’ treatises modelled on Aristotle’s Poetics, but often they were prefaces, dialogues et cetera written to defend a certain practice (Dryden, Fielding, Wordsworth), advice to poets and critics based on the model of Horace’s Ars Poetica (Boileau, Pope), or defences against moralists or other enemies of poetry (Sidney, Shelley). Poetics was defined through the set of concerns on which Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus had focused, but the way in which these concerns were addressed and discussed depended on what ideas were current in other areas of intellectual life at any one time, and on what was the purpose of the discussion. There was no disciplinary method, nor a tradition of argument that provided a consistent frame for discussion of these concerns.

The deeper reason for the lack of coherent discursive practices in criticism and in poetics can be found in the lack of the social utility of such practices. The social utility of a discipline of knowledge is dependent upon the degree to which it requires specialist knowledge. If everyone had the necessary knowledge to cure diseases, there would be no need for doctors. ‘If we all
possessed the specialist knowledge of, say, architects or surveyors, there
would be no use or need for the professions of architecture or surveying;
conversely, it is precisely because we all do not, or rather cannot, possess
such knowledge that these professions do exist, and are valued. Among
the humanities disciplines, literary studies has a particular problem because
there is continuity between the way in which the common reader
apprehends the literary work through a process of reading and the
description and interpretation practised in literary studies which serve
the same epistemic function as does reading. The description, interpretation,
and evaluation of literary works which are at the core of the academic
discipline of literary studies apparently require no specialist knowledge.
This was the basic objection from those who resisted the introduction of a
separate discipline of literary studies when Oxford wanted to set up a
School of Modern European Languages and Literature:

It is surely allowable to hold that some studies are undesirable because they
are not solid enough, and others because they are in a certain sense too solid,
that is because they are too purely technical. As subjects for the examination
for the first degree, we do not want professional subjects – professional
subjects, when fit for the University course at all, ought to come after – and we
do not want, we will not say frivolous subjects, but subjects which are merely
light, elegant, interesting. As subjects for examination we must have subjects
in which it is possible to examine.

The description, interpretation and evaluation of the literary works were
conceived of as matters of taste. And while matters of taste may be
regulated by connoisseurs, everyone is entitled to their own opinion and
need not follow the leaders of fashion, since that is all they are. Thus one of
the main foundations for the claim to disciplinary status appears to be
lacking in the case of the study of literature.

The obvious way in which the study of literature could be turned into the
academic discipline of literary studies (Litteraturwissenschaft) was to provide
that study with a basis in a theory. A theory in the hard sciences provides a
delimitation of an object of study as well as licensing a method of study,
providing concepts for descriptions of the object of study, rules for valid
arguments, and criteria for verification. A theory would provide literary
studies with ‘scientific’ credentials that would guarantee its disciplinary
status and intellectual authority.

There appeared to be two ways in which the study of literature could
establish a theoretical basis. It could borrow a disciplinary protocol, i.e.
concepts, methods, criteria for validity, and rules of argument et cetera from
other sciences, hard or soft. Alternatively a ‘critical science’ of literary
studies could try to develop its own theoretical concepts, methods, criteria for validity, rules of argument, and so forth.

Both these ways were tried. The attempts to transfer methods and concepts from the natural sciences on the whole proved either to yield trivial results of little interest for literary studies, or they involved accepting speculative theories that could not be confirmed or disconfirmed but which might be confirmed some time in the future when science knew more about the phenomena involved. Thus I. A. Richards proposed the theory that literature reveals and brings about a balance between conflicting mental impulses and thus improves the reader’s mental health. Richards admits that one cannot at the moment confirm this theory, but he maintains that it will be confirmed when one knows more about the central nervous system and how it works. Richards does not discuss the obvious epistemological problems raised by this kind of theory: what is postulated when one postulates a correlation between neuro-physiological processes and mental states? Such problems were never acknowledged and, consequently, they were never discussed by critics who borrowed concepts and methods from the hard sciences.

Attempts to transfer methods and concepts from the social sciences also failed to result in a unified theory of literature. Freud’s theories were used to explain single works, oeuvres, and the phenomenon of literature itself. And Jung’s theory of archetypes was used to explain the appeal and attraction that literary works have had for generations of readers over centuries. However, the methods and concepts borrowed from these theories did not become generally accepted as methods and concepts constituting a theory of literature. Similarly, sociological theories applied to literature resulted in sociology of literature and not a ‘critical science’ dealing with ‘the text, character, composition, and origin of literary documents’.

Attempts to develop an independent framework of theoretical concepts, methods, criteria for validity, and rules of argument that were distinctive of literary studies also failed, at least until the mid-1960s. Austin Warren and René Wellek’s Theory of Literature (1942) was ‘a book full of concrete information and advice on literary scholarship and poetics’, but did not really attempt to found an independent theory of literature. The only large-scale and ambitious such attempt in the 1950s was Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). In his introduction to this book Northrop Frye declared that literary criticism could become a scientific discipline only if one succeeded in developing ‘a conceptual framework which criticism alone possesses’. Literary studies, according to Frye, were in a state of ‘naïve induction’. ‘I suggest’, Frye says,
that it is time for criticism to leap to a new ground from which it can discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual framework are. Criticism seems to be badly in need of a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.  

The problem for Frye’s ambitious attempts to provide a theoretical foundation for the study of literature was that there did not exist a tradition of theoretical discourse that would provide a basis for the necessary agreement among the prospective practitioners of the discipline about theoretical concepts, methods, criteria for validity, rules of arguments et cetera. Such an agreement is a necessary precondition for a discipline to come into existence. The agreement in question here is of a special type: it defines the community of individuals that constitutes the practitioners of the discipline. Without such an agreement there is no discipline, only the private views of individuals or groups of like-minded people. Frye’s theory was simply such a private view. For the disciplinary framework accepted by the community of practitioners also provides criteria for how theories are to be judged. In the absence of such a framework theories have no intellectual authority. The advantage in taking over a conceptual apparatus and methods from a well-established discipline is that the problem of intellectual authority does not arise: it is guaranteed by the existing discipline.

4

Those who in the 1970s and 1980s came to style themselves as ‘Theorists’ in literary studies shared an assumption that something like the conceptual leap that Frye was attempting in fact took place in literary studies in the course of the 1960s. Literary studies were then provided with a basis in Theory:

In the late nineteenth century, Germanic philology initiated the rise of scholarship in the English-speaking university world; in the 1920s, the writings of T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards launched the era of criticism. To risk a third sweeping generalization, we may regard the period between the mid 1960s and the present day as the age of theory.

On this view the reflections about art and literature in works such as T. E. Hulme’s Speculations (1924), T. S. Eliot’s The Sacred Wood (1920), The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), On Poetry and Poets (1957) and I. A. Richards’s Principles of Literary Criticism (1924), Science and Poetry (1926), and
Practical Criticism (1929) do not constitute Theory. Theory proper, the kind of theory that can provide literary studies with scientific credentials and guarantee its disciplinary status comes into being only with the linguistic turn in literary studies,

when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic, considerations or, to put it somewhat less crudely, when the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of value prior to their establishment – the implication being that this establishment is problematic enough to require an autonomous discipline of critical investigation to consider its possibility and its status.

One may, however, question whether the arrival of the ‘age of theory’ actually saw an intellectual development in literary studies constituting the ‘conceptual leap’ necessary to turn literary studies into a rigorous academic discipline. It is necessary to distinguish the question concerning the social and institutional organisation of literary studies from the question concerning its intellectual foundation and principles. There is some basis for arguing that a limited social and institutional reorganisation of literary studies started in the middle of the 1960s. Literary theory was given more attention in departments of literary studies and was accepted as a specialisation on the same level as period or genre studies. A number of journals specialising in literary theory were founded, and literary theory started to appear as a separate category on publishers’ lists. A new term was also introduced, as ‘literary theory’ became ‘Critical Theory’ or just ‘Theory’, and this term served as a social marker that here was a new phenomenon.

This limited reorganisation of literary studies was accompanied by three distinct but related rhetorical moves by supporters of Critical Theory aimed at giving credence to the view that an intellectual development in literary studies, involving the sort of conceptual leap that Frye had wanted to achieve, was actually taking place. One such move is exemplified in Jonathan Culler’s Framing the Sign, where Culler ascribes the development of Critical Theory in literature departments in the United States to a changed conception of the university. He distinguishes two general models ‘by which universities operate’:

The first makes the university the transmitter of a cultural heritage, gives it the ideological function of reproducing culture and the social order. The second model makes the university a site for the production of knowledge . . .
In the first model, teaching is the most important activity in the university; in the second model, research is given priority. Culler argues that humanities departments in the United States in the 1970s gave up the model of the university as an institution aiming at social and cultural reproduction, and instead adopted a model of the university as a producer of knowledge. According to this conception,

> a university is not an integrated unit commanded by a concept of education so much as an administrative apparatus for managing a series of loosely-integrated activities, each of which follows a particular logic, determined by developments in the discipline, priorities set by funding agencies, or pressing social issues.\(^{45}\)

This, according to Culler, led to a vast increase in the availability of grants which in its turn created a need for justifying projects that would be given grants:

> The increasing availability of grants encourages critics to reflect on their critical activity: in seeking to justify what they propose to do to an audience they take to be representative of the profession, critics help enunciate the rationality of a discipline, generating a lingua franca in which new approaches or projects are justified in familiar terms and traditional research is given some new, attractive twist.\(^{46}\)

Culler argues that a social and institutional change (a change in the conception of the function of the university with a consequent change in funding practice) initiated an intellectual change (the development of a discourse about the rationality of the discipline). However, in his account he does not discuss what kind of intellectual requirements literary studies had to fulfil to become a rigorous academic discipline, nor does he discuss whether the development of Critical Theory actually did turn literary studies into a discipline fulfilling these requirements. Indeed, Culler does not distinguish between questions concerning the social and institutional organisation of literary studies and questions concerning its intellectual foundation and principles. His account of the development of literary studies does, however, have the rhetorical function of giving credence to the view that in this period, because of the development of Critical Theory, literary studies, for the first time in its history, emerges as a genuine academic discipline, the aim of which is to produce new knowledge through research.

It is interesting to note that Culler’s account completely ignores the longer perspective introduced at the beginning of this article. The conception of the university as a producer rather than a transmitter of
knowledge was the basic conception underlying the reform of the universities that started in the early nineteenth century with the reorganisation of the University of Berlin. There was no dramatic change in the conception of the university in humanities departments in the 1960s. The attempt to theorise literary studies arose as a response to the pressure from the already existing conception of the university as a knowledge producer. As pointed out in section 3 above, it was not a new kind of response. Moreover, it was not the only kind of response. Another response to this pressure was the development of various kinds of critical methods with a disciplinary protocol that did not necessarily have a basis in any explicit theory.47 Placing the change in the conception of the university in the 1960s is a rhetorical move aimed at supporting the view that the conceptual leap so much desired by Frye then took place.

The second rhetorical move is exemplified by the following passage from Terry Eagleton’s Introduction to Literary Theory:

What are the gains of structuralism? To begin with, it represents a remorseless demystification of literature. It is less easy after Greimas and Genette to hear the cut and thrust of the rapiers in line three, or feel that you know just what it feels like to be a scarecrow after reading The Hollow Men. Loosely subjective talk was chastised by a criticism which recognized that the literary work, like any other product of language, is a construct, whose mechanisms could be classified and analysed like the objects of any other science. ... With the advent of structuralism, the world of the great aestheticians and humanist literary scholars of twentieth-century Europe – the world of Croce, Curtius, Auerbach, Spitzer and Wellek seemed one whose hour had passed. These men, with their formidable erudition, imaginative insight and cosmopolitan range of allusion, appeared suddenly in historical perspective, as luminaries of a high European humanism which predated the turmoil and conflagration of the mid-twentieth century. It seemed clear that such a rich culture could not be reinvented – that the choice was between learning from it and passing on, or clinging with nostalgia to its remnants in our time, denouncing a ‘modern world’ in which the paperback has spelt the death of high culture, and where there are no longer domestic servants to protect one’s door while one reads in privacy.48

The rhetorical move in this passage is to adopt a vocabulary that implicitly claims that structuralism has moved literary studies on to the level of a science. Structuralism conceives of the literary work as ‘a construct’ whose mechanisms can be ‘classified and analysed like the objects of any other science’. Moreover, the knowledge provided by structuralism is progressive. Structuralism yields gains. Literary studies progress and the literary scholars of yesterday are left behind. There is, however, no argument to establish that literary studies based in structuralist theory fulfils the
intellectual requirements to an academic discipline. Indeed, this is a question that is not even mooted in Eagleton’s presentation.

The third rhetorical is related to the second one and can again be exemplified from Culler’s *Framing the Sign*:

In psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan’s argument that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ and the rereadings of Freud by Jacques Derrida and others, stressing the constitutive role of verbal connections and word play, *show* the importance in the functioning of the psyche of a logic of signification that is most clearly observed in literary discourse. Philosophical inquiry also *demonstrates* the inescapable centrality of figurative language: the very attempt to separate literal from figurative depends on concepts which themselves are scarcely free of rhetorical or metaphorical qualities.

This passage from Jonathan Culler contains two rhetorical features that are ubiquitous in presentations of Critical Theory. It employs words like ‘show’ and ‘demonstrate’, and it invokes the authority of what appears to be an established body of research results. The rhetorical force of ‘show’ and ‘demonstrate’ is to imply that the two theses put forward in the passage have the status of knowledge akin to that produced by disciplines where terms like ‘show’ and ‘demonstrate’ is normally used, and where there are strict criteria for what counts as showing or demonstrating.

The appeal to a body of apparently established research has two central features. There is what Raymond Tallis has called ‘The Body of Evidence Gambit’, ‘by which it is implied that either the final paradox or the intermediate general principles have been established as true elsewhere’. Argument and proof are always deferred, always present only through their absence. The Body of Evidence Gambit is supplemented by what may be called the Appeal to Authority Move. The authority can be, as in the above example, general and unspecific (‘Philosophical inquiry also demonstrates . . .’). It can be an unspecific ‘we’, invoking spurious consensus on a controversial issue:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

We have learned to ask whether universalist claims do not in fact promote as a norm the concerns of a particular group and set aside as partial or limited those of other groups.

Or the authority can be a theory which, or a prestigious figure who, is assumed to have established new unquestionable insights:
The structuralist emphasis on the ‘constructedness’ of human meaning represented a major advance. Meaning was neither a private experience nor a divinely ordained occurrence: it was the product of certain shared systems of signification.\(^53\)

But if Freud decentred the individual and Marx decentred history, it was finally Saussure’s decentring of language which made possible so much of the subsequent work I have mentioned. In revealing language as a system of differences with no positive terms, Saussure implicitly put in question the ‘metaphysics of presence’ which had dominated Western philosophy.\(^54\)

However, the appeal to a body of established research results in these cases collapses into an appeal to authority. A controversial view is presented as beyond discussion because it is guaranteed by an unquestioned authority, an authority which is substituted for argument.

Though rhetorical moves of this type may produce conviction in a target audience for a time, they fail to address the question whether the advent of Critical Theory did provide the necessary theoretical basis for guaranteeing the disciplinary credentials and intellectual authority of literary studies.

5

In the attempt to characterise the intellectual foundations of Critical Theory one can adopt one of two very different perspectives. One may focus on the fact that Critical Theory embraces a number of different theories based on different sets of premises that contradict each other at least in part. If one adopts this perspective, one will emphasise the differences between, for example, structuralism and post-structuralism and underline the conflict between these types of theory and, for example, Marxist and feminist theories. One will foreground the antagonism between Marxist theory and feminist theory and the disagreements about basic issues within feminist theory. ‘The crucial distinction’, says Jonathan Culler, ‘is not between an inclusive structuralism and traditional criticism but between structuralism and “post-structuralism,” as it is often called’:

In simplest terms, structuralists take linguistics as a model and attempt to develop ‘grammars’ – systematic inventories of elements and their possibilities of combination – that would account for the form and meaning of literary works; poststructuralists investigate the way in which this project is subverted by the workings of the texts themselves. Structuralists are convinced that systematic knowledge is possible; post-structuralists claim to know only the impossibility of this knowledge.\(^55\)
For those who see themselves as ‘Theorists’ the problem with this perspective is that literary studies then appears as a field of ideological and political conflict and not as an academic discipline. None of the theories that make up Critical Theory will then be supported by an agreed and uncontested framework of theoretical concepts, methods, criteria for validity, rules of arguments et cetera that make up a disciplinary protocol, and consequently none of these theories can claim intellectual authority.

The perspective normally adopted by the supporters of the many different types of Critical Theory is, however, the perspective adopted by Selden and Eagleton. The focus is on the contrast between old-fashioned ‘humanistic criticism’ and ‘modern’ literary studies founded in Critical Theory. Critical Theory is assumed to provide a theoretical framework for all aspects of literary studies. The source of this theoretical framework is Ferdinand de Saussure’s lecture notes published under the title Cours de linguistique générale (1916) and subsequently developed and applied in French structuralist analysis of literary and cultural phenomena. ‘The advent of theory,’ says Paul de Man,

the break that is now so often being deplored and that sets it aside from literary history and from literary criticism, occurs with the introduction of linguistic terminology in the meta-language about literature. By linguistic terminology is meant a terminology that designates reference prior to designating the referent and takes into account, in the consideration of the world, the referential function of language or, to be somewhat more specific, that considers reference as a function of language and not necessarily as an intuition. . . . Contemporary literary theory comes into its own in such events as the application of Saussurian linguistics to literary texts.\(^5\)

If one adopts this perspective one can argue that there is a fundamental unity among the various theories that are covered by the term ‘Critical Theory’. There appears to be a unified conceptual scheme and a framework of rules for what constitutes valid argument. Moreover, it is possible to define an object of research, the text, that manifests those systems of signification that the conceptual scheme is aimed at clarifying and explaining. The assumption that there is a type of entity, i.e. text or writing, that can be described and explained by applying this particular (Saussurian) linguistic conceptual scheme, is accepted both in structuralist and poststructuralist/deconstructionist theories. When Culler insists that ‘The crucial distinction is not between an inclusive structuralism and traditional criticism but between structuralism and “post-structuralism”’, on the grounds that
structuralists take linguistics as a model and attempt to develop 'grammars' – systematic inventories of elements and their possibilities of combination – that would account for the form and meaning of literary works; poststructuralists investigate the way in which this project is subverted by the workings of the texts themselves. Structuralists are convinced that systematic knowledge is possible; post-structuralists claim to know only the impossibility of this knowledge . . .

he fails to point out that the disagreement that he describes is meaningful only if both theories make use of a linguistic conceptual framework. Both theories work with the same object of research, the text, and both make use of the same Saussurean conceptual framework. It is this, of course, that makes poststructuralist theory post-structuralist and not post something else.

However, from the very first the attempt to employ the conceptual framework of Saussurean structuralist linguistics in the description of cultural phenomena in general, and in particular in the descriptions of literary works, met with three well-grounded objections. The first is that the conceptual framework and the arguments that Critical Theory took over from Saussurean linguistics are difficult to transfer from the description of words and their combination in sentences to descriptions of cultural phenomena in general and to literary works in particular. The second standard criticism was that the cultural phenomena – literary works among them – which the various types of Critical Theory aim to describe are not adequately described as ‘texts’. Even if it might have been possible to transfer the conceptual framework of structuralist linguistics to other cultural phenomena than language, any description employing the concepts of this framework would fail to capture what makes these cultural phenomena what they are. The third objection is that Saussure's structuralist theory of language has come in for serious criticism within the discipline of linguistics and, because of these criticisms, is no longer seen as a viable descriptive framework even for language. These criticisms apply to all versions of Critical Theory, from structuralism to poststructuralism and deconstruction, and to any version of Marxism, feminist theory, postcolonial theory et cetera that employs a linguistic/semantic conceptual scheme. The first and the third objection strike at the heart of the claim that a structuralist framework can provide Critical Theory with a disciplinary matrix. The second objection dismisses the object of study/research that Critical Theory postulates. These criticisms destroyed the claim that the introduction of Critical Theory represented the conceptual leap that made literary studies into an academic discipline, thus depriving the structuralist paradigm of any intellectual credibility that it might have had as a
disciplinary paradigm. Critical Theory came to be seen for what it was: a field of competing ideologies none of which has the necessary intellectual authority to claim that it provides well-founded answers to general, theoretical problems that arise in connection with the nature, value and appreciation of literature.

However, few supporters of Critical Theory will draw this conclusion. As Josephine Guy and Ian Small point out, theoretical pluralism seems to be accepted among supporters of the various types of Critical Theory and they appear unaware of the necessary consequence that this deprives all types of Critical Theory of intellectual authority. Indeed, within literary studies attempts have been made to make theoretical pluralism and conflict into a virtue. Gerald Graff’s survey of the development of the academic discipline of English in the United States, Professing Literature: An Institutional History, has as its main thesis that academic literary criticism from the very beginning has consisted in a series of theoretical conflicts and that this somehow enriches the discipline of literary studies:

These controversies have seemed to me to possess greater richness and vitality than any of the conclusions they led to about the nature of literary studies as a discipline – or the nature of literature as an object. Among the matters in dispute have been not just the nature of literature and the discipline, but whether there is – or needs to be such a thing as a ‘discipline’ of literary studies at all, or such a thing as ‘literature’ in some univocal sense, as opposed to a variety of different literary and critical activities made coherent, if at all, only by their conflicts.

The problem with seeing Critical Theory as a number of different critical/theoretical activities bound together only by being in conflict, is that such a conflict cannot be understood as an intellectual conflict but only as an ideological conflict where rational argument has no place. A literary criticism without a theoretical paradigm that defines a framework of concepts and rules of argument (a disciplinary matrix and a disciplinary protocol agreed on and shared by all those who engage in literary studies), permits the critic to use literature in the way he or she finds most interesting or politically expedient. In what some critics call the post-paradigmatic state, literary criticism therefore dissolves into so many different forms of propaganda:

the postparadigmatic state of literary theory offers the student and the teacher the opportunity to explore the uncertain yet addictive relationship between literary writing and their own more immediate perceptions of enjoyment,
diversion, class, history, gender, race . . . Literary critics and theorists might not be able to do or achieve anything in particular, but we involve just about everything.⁶²

6

‘Literary theory, in the forms in which we know it,’ says Terry Eagleton, ‘is a child of the social and political convulsions of the 1960s.’⁶³ What the various theories that can be grouped under the banner of Critical Theory share is a liberation ideology that came to dominate some academic environments after the student ‘revolt’ of 1968. This liberation ideology is in its origin negative rather than constructive and is aimed at undermining the existing social and political order. It is in this perspective that one must see the use of Saussurean linguistics. His kind of structuralist linguistics is used as a point of departure because it seems it can be used to legitimise a form of scepticism that would entail the rejection of what is seen as ‘traditional values’. In the interpretation that proponents of various versions of Critical Theory give of Saussure’s structuralist linguistics, language is seen as a closed system where the basic units attain their meaning through the mutual relations they enter into with all the other units of the system.⁶⁴ The content of all language-dependent concepts is consequently determinable without reference to anything outside language. But this interpretation also introduces two assumptions that are not made explicit and for which no argument is given. It is assumed that all concepts are language-dependent and, consequently, that all concepts that can be expressed in language are language-dependent. These assumptions legitimise the conclusion that the content of all perception and all thought is language-dependent. Both these assumptions are, however, controversial. It is uncontroversial that many concepts that can be expressed in language are language-dependent in the sense that one could not have these concepts if one did not speak a language. However, it does not follow from this that all concepts that are as a matter of fact expressed in language are language-dependent, or, indeed, that all concepts are language-dependent. A new and different argument is needed to establish these assumptions.

Furthermore, in Critical Theory language is seen as a social and cultural phenomenon and as such it gives form and substance to the distinctions that a culture finds it worth making and to the values on which a society is built and to which it gives priority. Since we are born into a language, our view of reality and the values that we have are a product of the cultural background and the social environment that have formed us. Individuals that speak different languages consequently live in different worlds.
The next step in this type of argument is more radical and turns it into a radical form of ontological and epistemological scepticism: since language constitutes all the reality that we can know, there can be no reality independent of language, and if there was such a reality we could know nothing about its existence. This step is presented as a conclusion following from the assumptions made and the conclusions previously established. However, this is a non sequitur. There is no connection between previous assumptions and conclusions in the argument and this new step except perhaps a psychological one. However, it is a non sequitur with serious consequences. One can now argue that since there is no independent world, nor is there any norm for what statements about the world are true, truth is a social construction. Furthermore, one must look at values (moral, social, and aesthetic) as social constructions. The same can be said about personal identity. Our identity is constructed through the stories that we tell about ourselves. But since there is no history about ourselves that can be measured for truth against an external standard, there is no true history of who or what we are: there are just different histories. We are not, however, free to tell whatever stories we like about ourselves. To tell any history about anything at all we have to use the language and the narrative forms that we have been taught. Thus our personality is a product of the stories that our language and the narrative forms of our culture enable us to tell. And finally, our language and our culture are in their nature accidental: they could have been different and they will change over time. Consequently our notions of what is true, and what is right and wrong and aesthetically valuable, of who we are and what it is to be human, are also accidental and mutable.

It is in the light of this use of Saussure’s structuralist linguistics that one has to understand statements like the following:

*Anyone who still believes that the study of literature will guarantee access to high culture, standard morality, social responsibility or intellectual grandeur is either a politician or a fabricating opportunist – or, more likely, both.*

For literary studies the consequence of this argument is that there can be no aesthetic value or aesthetic properties that characterise the literary work of art. Neither can there therefore be any such thing as a literary work of art that can be distinguished from other types of texts through the properties (internal, relational, or others) that it possesses by virtue of being a literary work of art. There is thus no systematic difference between literary works and other texts. To the extent that there exists a concept ‘literary work’, and there is such a concept in existence, it must be seen as a social construction.
that serves a political aim, as an ideological concept that is used to impose on those who accept it a set of false values that contribute to the repression of certain ethnically, socially, and gender-defined groups. Seeing the concept of a literary work as a fiction with merely a political function deprives literary studies of its object of study and literary criticism of its function: elucidating how a literary work manifests the aesthetic values that literary works ‘traditionally’ have been seen as embodying. The natural conclusion of this argument is that literary studies are dead:

As we all know, English is dead . . . The age of innocence is past and in its place we have a literature riven by history and unconscious desire, a literature always other to itself, a battle site of and for meaning, not the place where meaning finds its most perfect expression. All this can be taken for granted.66

The death of literary studies is not to be mourned but to be welcomed as a liberation. It opens the way for a new concept of what literary studies should be and has led to the subject being ‘revivified and revolutionised’.67

It is, however, meaningless to talk about a discipline if one accepts the radical scepticism summarised above as the common intellectual foundation for Critical Theory. There is no longer a theoretical ‘paradigm’. One has entered what Richard Bradford in the passage quoted above calls the post-paradigmatic state:

The new paradigm has arrived, but what is it? The energies and motivating forces of critical writing have shifted from a centripetal emphasis upon the constitution of the literary text to the centrifugal forces that sweep such artefacts into the diffuse and untidy cosmos of philosophy, gender studies, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, historicism and so on. Perhaps we should offer the new paradigm the prefix now carried by most of its constituent isms: we now inhabit the postparadigm. This collection reflects and embodies the postparadigmatic condition.68

In this post-paradigmatic state there is no agreement between the proponents of the various versions of Critical Theory on an intellectual framework that is the precondition for the existence of a discipline:

there seems to be no emerging consensus which could constitute a new paradigm. For some, the critical field has a disturbingly postmodern groundlessness: we can choose to become either reactionaries working on outmoded but workable models, committed formalists refining the methodologies of the masters, or bricoleurs reworking the rich plurality of theories and producing wonderful but fragile constructions. For some, the choices have an
When, nevertheless, supporters of various kinds of Critical Theory insist on a contrast between ‘before’ and ‘after’ in the history of literary studies, between the epoch of ‘criticism’ and the epoch of ‘theory’, or between the ‘old paradigm’ and the ‘post-paradigmatic state’, and also insist that the difference is ‘epochal’, then this cannot be because Frye’s ambition of ‘[a] leap to a new ground from which [criticism could] discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual framework are’ has been realised. What ties the different types of Critical Theory together and constitutes the radical break with the ‘era of theory’ is the ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ that is legitimised by the kind of sceptical argument that Saussure’s structuralist linguistic is held to support.

This theoretical anti-humanism that binds the various types of Critical Theory together consists in a rhetoric that dismisses basic humanist values. This form of theoretical anti-humanism must be distinguished from the theoretical a-humanism that necessarily follows from turning a cultural entity into an object for academic research. The research ideal that Frye formulates in the introduction to *Anatomy of Criticism*, and that can be found in structuralism, dictates that one puts aside all forms of interpretation that have as their goal to reveal the value of a literary work and instead looks disinterestedly at the phenomenon of literature. Such an a-humanist research ideal is legitimate but, as was pointed out above, it has proved impossible to introduce into literary studies because it has been impossible to find a common intellectual framework that could ensure the disciplinary nature of theoretical inquiry. It would also fail to provide a conceptual framework rich enough to characterise what features of a literary work make it great literature. For this, one has to adopt an internal perspective which enables the identification and characterisation of literary value. Proponents of the various types of Critical Theory do not distinguish this form of a-humanistic perspective from the form of anti-humanism that is legitimised through the sceptical argument that apparently rests on Saussurean structuralist linguistics. The rhetorical effect of this is that the anti-humanist perspective emerges as a result of a new theoretical foundation that guarantees the legitimacy of this perspective. This guarantee is, however, worthless. Supporters of Critical Theory have not only failed to establish a theoretical framework for an academic discipline of knowledge that fulfils the criteria that academic disciplines of knowledge normally fulfil, but they also fail to recognise that the scientific perspective that such a discipline would provide is a-humanist and not anti-humanist.
The fact that Critical Theory has failed to establish itself as an agreed intellectual framework which could confer disciplinary status on literary studies, and that the various versions of Critical Theory are only held together by anti-humanist rhetoric, makes the place of Critical Theory in literary studies uncertain and its future unpredictable. In *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too*, Stanley Fish compares Critical Theory with Milton Studies which, according to Fish, is well established as a branch of literary studies:

Milton’s career is thus on a much surer footing than the career of theory (which according to many observers is more or less over and is certainly played out), not because Milton himself (a phrase finally without a sense) exceeds the enterprise of Milton studies, but because that enterprise is so well established, so much a feature of any presently imaginable scene, that one can say of it that it is something the world will not willingly let die.72

From the mid-1990s onwards the observation that the ‘age of theory’ has come to an end is being repeated with increasing frequency by supporters of Critical Theory themselves: ‘The so-called “Moment of Theory”’, says Peter Widdowson,

may be charted from the late-1960s, through its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, to the current situation in which some would argue that its ‘Moment’ is over, and others that it is now so much in the intellectual bloodstream that ‘continuum’ is a more accurate word to describe it.73

Given the lack of a coherent and shared intellectual framework for Critical Theory it is difficult to understand in what way it could become a part of the *intellectual* bloodstream (my italics). If the ‘age of Critical Theory’ is over, it is because the anti-humanist rhetoric that constitutes its unity is no longer politically acceptable in the academic institutions that harbour literary studies.

If one looks at Critical Theory as an attempt to provide a theoretical basis for literary studies which would make it into an academic discipline of knowledge, it is not unreasonable to say that the ‘age of theory’ was over the moment it became clear that the structuralist attempt to introduce the linguistic model into literary studies was doomed to failure. However, the poststructuralist criticism of structuralism was strongly conservative and did not focus on the basic problem in structuralist theory: the attempt to apply a linguistic (syntactic, semantic, rhetorical) conceptual scheme to literature. Instead, the very criticism of structuralism was made into a
‘theoretical project’ that continued to assume that literary works could be treated as texts and that concepts appropriate for characterising language and linguistic constructions could be used to formulate insights about literature:

This undoing of theory, this disturbance of the stable cognitive field that extends from grammar to logic to a general science of man and of the phenomenal world, can in its turn be made into a theoretical project of rhetorical analysis that will reveal the inadequacy of Grammatical models of non-reading. Rhetoric, by its actively negative relationship to Grammar and to logic, certainly undoes the claims of the trivium (and by extension, of language) to be an epistemologically stable construct. The resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language, a dimension which is perhaps more explicitly in the foreground in literature (broadly conceived) than in other verbal manifestations or – to be somewhat less vague – which can be revealed in any verbal event when it is read textually.74

A radical criticism of structuralism would have pointed out that its main problem was exactly the assumption that the object of analysis in literary studies was text, and the attempt to apply a linguistic vocabulary in the description of the phenomenon of literature. The moment the attempt to establish a structuralist theoretical framework for the discussion of literature broke down, Critical Theory no longer had a future. The declaration that ‘this undoing of theory’ can be made into a theoretical project of rhetorical analysis is an empty gesture that contributes nothing towards an adequate conceptual apparatus for the analysis of the phenomenon of literature. To the extent that Critical Theory can be seen as an attempt to realise Frye’s ambition to develop literary theory as an academic discipline, the declaration that the ‘age of theory’ is over comes twenty years too late.

It is an interesting rhetorical feature of the observation made by the supporters of various types of Critical Theory that they make use of the idiom of ‘moment’, ‘age’, ‘era’, ‘epoch’. This is the idiom appropriate to an ideology. A form of ideology and the rhetoric through which it manifests itself ‘has its time’. The ideology and the rhetoric through which it manifests itself are motivated by the social and political interests of a group or a community in a certain period. The observation that the moment of theory is over has its background in the fact that the social and political interests which found a common denominator in the anti-humanist rhetoric that characterised the various versions of Critical Theory no longer have the support they once had. To say that the moment of theory is over is an empirical observation that makes no reference to the intellectual content of
Critical Theory. The question whether Critical Theory is tenable is not raised at all. My argument in this article has been that there are good reasons why this question cannot be raised: Critical Theory cannot be rebutted or found untenable because it has no agreed intellectual framework that can provide a basis for such a rebuttal. Therefore Critical Theory can have no future once it loses its ideological function.

Notes

1 The term ‘scientist’ was not coined until the mid-1830s. The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edn, Oxford, 1992) quotes an article from the Quarterly Review in 1834, where the problem of what to call men doing science is discussed:

Science ... loses all traces of unity. A curious illustration of this result may be observed in the want of any name by which we can designate the students of the knowledge of the material world collectively. We are informed that this difficulty was felt very oppressively by the members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at their meetings ... in the last three summers. ... Philosophers was felt to be too wide and too lofty a term ...; savans was rather assuming ...; some ingenious gentleman proposed that, by analogy with artist, they might form scientist, and added that there could be no scruple in making free with this termination when we have such words as sciolist, economist, and atheist – but this was not generally palatable. (Quarterly Review, vol. 51, no. 59 (1834)


In the expansion of German Universities the *Philosophische Fakultät* (which included all arts and sciences, but not medicine, law and theology) had had the lion’s share. In 1881–6 it was the largest of the four faculties and in the last part of the century more than half of all University teachers belonged to it . . . Yet within the *Philosophische Fakultät* the greatest increase in chairs was due to comparative linguistics and to the non-classical languages (oriental and modern languages). (Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 8)


7 Ibid., 27.


13 One can get an impression of the variety of such comments and judgements, of the variety of purposes for which they were made, the variety of people that made them, and the various forms in which they were made, by looking through and dipping into collections such as *The Critical Heritage* series. Particularly useful are the two volumes on Chaucer which cover the whole period from the late middle ages to the early twentieth century, and the five volumes on Shakespearean criticism that cover the ground from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. See Derek Brewer (ed.), *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, 1385–1837; vol. 2, 1837–1933 (London: Routledge, 1978); Brian Vickers (ed.), *William Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, 1623–1692; vol. 2, 1693–1733; vol. 3, 1733–1752; vol. 4, 1753–1765; vol. 5, 1765–1774; vol. 6, 1774–1801 (London: Routledge, 1974–6).

14 In this as in so many other areas it is in commentaries on Shakespeare that such critical developments emerge. A brief survey of the development of character interpretation in Shakespearean criticism is given by David Nichol Smith in his introduction to David Nichol Smith (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (1903; 2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xxxii–xxxvii.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 25.


23 Ibid.


25 ‘The only existing book which covers our topic in *extenso*’, says Wellek,

George Saintsbury’s *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (3 vols. 1900–04), while admirable in its sweep and still readable because of the liveliness of the author’s exposition and style, is not only outdated by having been written fifty years ago, during the heyday of impressionism and art for art’s sake, but seems to me seriously vitiated by its professed lack of interest in questions of theory and aesthetics. (René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950*, vol. 1, vi)


28 In this paragraph I use the term ‘poetics’ to refer to ‘the principles and theory of literature, its nature, its creation, its function, its effects, its relations to the other activities of man, its kinds, devices, and techniques, its origins and history’, and
to differentiate this from ‘description and interpretation’ of literary works. I reserve the term ‘criticism’ for the latter.


30 Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 54. Guy and Small discuss in some detail the concept of social utility as it has been developed in the sociology of professions (pp. 51–5). They sum up their discussion as follows:

As we have indicated, the first and fundamental intellectual condition for the founding of a discipline of knowledge concerns the specialized nature of the knowledge it produces. That concept of specialism is in turn posited on an agreement about a discrete or autonomous object of study, and on an agreement about the practices appropriate to explaining it. The second intellectual condition concerns the social utility of the discipline, and, as we have argued, that utility is directly related to the specialist nature of the knowledge produced. (p. 55)

31 E. A. Freeman, ‘Literature and Language’, Contemporary Review, October 1887, 562. Freeman was at the time Regius Professor of History at Oxford.

32 It is worth quoting Freeman again:

we must know for certain what the study of ‘literature’ means on the lips of those who talk most loudly about it. They mean by the word, if we rightly understand them, the reading of books, the criticism of books, the finding out everything about the writers of the books, what they did, what they thought, anything that can better make one understand the books and the writers; but all essentially as a matter of taste. I am not sure that the word ‘taste’ quite expresses all that is wanted, but I know of no one word that will come nearer to expressing it. (Freeman, ‘Literature and Language’, 560)


34 On Richards’s theory it was not possible to distinguish between a situation where impulses were in conflict and a situation where they were in balance. However, according to Richards this problem would be solved as soon as one knew more about the central nervous system:

We can only conjecture dimly what difference holds between a balance and reconciliation of impulses and a mere rivalry or conflict. One difference is that a balance sustains one state of mind, but a conflict two alternating states. This, however, does not take us very far. The chief misconception which prevents progress here is the switchboard view of the mind. What conception should be put in its place is still doubtful, but we have already (Chapters XIV and XX)
discussed the reasons which make a more adequate conception imperative. The rest of the difficulty is due merely to ignorance; we do not yet know enough about the central nervous system. (I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924; 2nd edn, London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1926), 251)

35 Freudian criticism in English is above all represented by Ernest Jones’s *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London: Gollanz, 1949), and good examples of Freudian theory are Norman Holland’s *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), and *Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973).


38 This is Wellek’s own characterisation of the book more than forty years after it was published. It appears in a response to Roman Ingarden’s criticism of Warren and Wellek’s use of ideas developed by Ingarden in *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (Halle (Saale): Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1931):

> Ingarden goes on quibbling this way, splitting hairs, never recognizing that my (and Austin Warren’s) book is not a philosophical treatise about value, norm, and structure, but a book full of concrete information and advice on literary scholarship and poetics. It uses, acknowledging the debt and praising Ingarden’s ingenuity and acumen, the analysis of a work of art according to strata (without accepting ‘metaphysical qualities’ and with doubts about the ‘schematized aspects’) and criticizes Ingarden for what I then thought was his neglect of the problem of evaluation and thus of criticism. I still think that ‘value, norm, and structure’ implicate one another, that there cannot be any study of literature without criticism and evaluation. (René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950*, vol. 7, *German, Russian and Eastern European Criticism, 1900–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 398; my italics)


40 Ibid., 16.

41 The only discussion so far of the *intellectual requirements* that literary studies must fulfil to claim status as an academic discipline is to be found in Guy and Small, *Politics and Value in English Studies*:

> Our second large concern is to outline the philosophical preconditions for the existence of disciplines of knowledge and to distinguish them from any political functions which that knowledge might possess. Here the central concept which we employ is that of a ‘community’: more precisely, we are
concerned with the distinction between a sociological or political understand- ing of the term ‘community’ (roughly meaning those agreements which unite particular interest groups) and a philosophical understanding of it – one which refers to the kind of agreement necessary for knowledge to be possible in the first instance. (pp. 2–3)

Defined in intellectual terms, the three constituent elements of a discipline of knowledge are: the object of study of the discipline in question; the practice or practices used to carry out the study of that object; and finally, a theory of that practice (that is, the explicit elaboration of both the principles which underlie it, and of the appropriateness and utility of the explanations which that practice produces). Moreover, in general terms there has to be a social agreement, or the grounds for a social agreement, in each of the three areas we have outlined. (p. 38)


43 De Man, The Resistance to Theory, 7.
44 Culler, Framing the Sign, 33.
45 Ibid., 34.
46 Ibid., 35.
49 Culler, ‘Literary Criticism and the American University’, 16; my italics. It is difficult not to notice the almost total vacuity of the phrase ‘Philosophical inquiry has demonstrated …’. The authority invoked here is wholly specious.
53 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, 107.


Ibid., 13–18.


In all fairness to Saussure, it must be said that *Cours de linguistique générale* can hardly support the interpretation that it has been given by the main proponents of structuralism/poststructuralism. Saussure has nothing to say about, e.g., reference. It is a question he does not raise.


‘There is little doubt’, says Raman Selden,

that the traditions of critical thought which are represented in this volume have transformed the practice of literary criticism in the English-speaking academic world. (Ibid.)

See also Bradford in the Preface to *The State of Theory*:

The old paradigm of the objectives and assumptions of literary studies began to crumble, at least in Britain and the USA, and the beginning of the 1960s. The 1958 Indiana conference on linguistics and literary studies can be regarded as its curtain call. Roman Jakobson was its star and his paper on ‘Linguistics and poetics’ was subtitled, with brilliant if unintended irony, ‘Closing statement’. (p. ix)
Or Widdowson, *Literature*:

What is beyond dispute, however, is that from the early-1970s onwards, wave after wave of new (and some older) theories destabilised ‘Literature’ and transformed literary criticism. (p. 81)

These are just a few among many such statements.

71 Selden, Introduction, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 8:

A dominant humanistic discourse has begun to give way to the languages of formalism, structuralism, and phenomenology. Of course, the new theoretical modes sometimes preserve humanistic perspectives: Wolfgang Iser’s reception theory, for example, is founded upon the human experience of the reader. However, the structuralist tradition has proved more resistant to, reappropriation by humanisms of one kind or another. It is this theoretical ‘antihumanism’ which marks a real break with the era of ‘criticism’. (p. 1)


74 De Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, 17; my italics.
In this paper a Moment method based on the second, third and fourth kind Chebyshev polynomials is proposed to approximate the solution of a linear two-point boundary value problem of the second order. The proposed method is flexible, easy to program and efficient. Two numerical examples are given for conciliating the results of this method, all the computation results are obtained using Matlab. The central moments in probability theory include the first through fourth derivatives of the probability density function yield the expected value (center), variation (spread), skew (degree of mirror reflection about the center) and kurtosis (tail-shape) of a given distribution. Physics has its moments including displacement, velocity and acceleration.