

The World of Literature

We must take ourselves seriously, all of them.

Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona*

"Why are we reading," asks Annie Dillard, "if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened and its deepest mysteries probed? Why are we reading, if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days. . . ."1 Dillard's questions smell of a musty age when meanings felt less fragile, authority was less uncertain, and everyday life was empty of electronic signals. Clearly, Dillard is no poststructuralist. Insistent on meaning and beauty, she is aesthetic kin to George Santayana: "Things are interesting because we care about them, and important because we need them."² Literature stands among those things.

Today the charge of sentimentalism often attaches to such stances. Contemporary thinkers commonly eschew meaning in favor of structure, stories in favor of texts, and lived experiences in favor of linguistic codes. Flesh-and-blood people are of less concern than linguistic functionaries "defined solely by [their] place in the text." The "entropy of language," not its shared continuities, commands attention. Out of such preoccupations emerges the author as an "anachronistic personage," as musty as Dillard's questions seem among language-game thinkers.³ Such poststructuralist stances remain ascendant, making balderdash of modern aesthetics and relegating thinkers like Dillard and Santayana to the dustbins of modern culture. I might also seem a purveyor of "discarded orthodoxies"—ideas considered "retrograde and insupportable" among many literary critics today.⁴ The very idea of a *world* of literature flies in the face of poststructuralist thought. 'World' implies an irreducible unity of some sort, not a multiplicity of elusive meanings. It posits order, however complex and dynamic; shared realities, however unique individuals' experiences of them; and the possi-

bility of transcending one's biographical situation, however fleeting the opportunity.

In music, architecture, painting, choreography, film, and literary criticism, understanding poststructuralism is essential to understanding post-World War II developments. My purposes lie elsewhere. I want to grasp the experiences of those who read and write British-American novels. To begin grasping those experiences requires respect for readers and writers standing some distance from the literary vanguard. It requires recognizing readers and writers as individuals with everyday lives comprising nonliterary obligations and pleasures; accepting individuals' need for beauty; allowing for the transcendental and respecting idealism without enshrining either as an obvious, easily won good. My purposes require an aesthetics shaped by modern advances like democracy, mass literacy, and the slow spread of human rights. To grasp the experiences of the so-called common reader and the popular novelist (whether critically acclaimed or not) means to back away from poststructuralism without denying its critical centrality to contemporary thought. The finest of sociological traditions mandate something other than a poststructuralist stance anyway. As I have implied elsewhere,⁵ poststructuralism is anti-sociological to the extent that its field of vision excludes the historical, sociocultural worlds wherein language can work at all. Although poststructuralist thought is useful for many analytical projects and will, at times, contribute to the methodological pluralism holding this project together, my undertaking requires focusing on the meaningful worlds human beings constitute for themselves.

Human beings live in multiple worlds, each comprising meaning-compatible experiences. People build up various worlds by endowing their experiences with meaning and finding that those experiences fall into subjectively distinct clusters. Among the worlds human beings thus constitute is the world of literature comprising meaningful experiences of fiction, poetry, and drama. In turn, every such experience—whether of writing, reading, criticizing, editing, or publishing—helps to constitute the literary world. Like most worlds, this one produces more than a few artifacts. Yet artifacts illuminate a world only insofar as they express the experiences of those constituting that world.

A world thus concerns what and how people experience. In Georg Simmel's terms, a world is a form whereby "the contents of life are structured, treated, and experienced" distinctively.⁶ As Alfred Schutz later showed, each world demands a specific cognitive style; that is, a distinctive sociality, tension of consciousness, suspension of doubts, time-perspective, and forms of self-experience and spontane-

ity. Describing the world of literature means grappling with its cognitive style. First, though, it means describing the world of everyday life, the "paramount reality" serving as the experiential touchstone of all other worlds.

The world of everyday life comprises experiences like brushing one's teeth, preparing a meal, talking on the telephone, and putting gas in one's car. Getting things done predominates. Projects and problems are "just there," taken for granted as "givens" demanding attention. The cognitive style specific to everyday life entails a sociality oriented to the "common intersubjective world of communication and social action"; its tension of consciousness is that of wide-awake, "full attention to life"; it suspends doubts about the reality of whatever currently concerns the individual; its time is the "standard time" of clocks, calendars, and schedules where "*durée* and cosmic time" intersect; it involves experiencing "the working self as the total self." In everyday life, spontaneity takes its forms in and through work; that is, in and through "action in the outer world, based upon a project and characterized by the intention to bring about the projected state of affairs by bodily movements."⁷

The world of everyday life leaves no room for imaginative writers and their readers any more than it leaves room for participating in religious ceremonies, athletic contests, or theatrical performances. Like the worlds of religion, sports, and the theater, the world of literature displaces its participants from everyday life. Yet no world stands wholly apart from that of everyday life. All human experiencing presupposes the commonsense world where people "know" that they can communicate with one another, that standpoints are interchangeable for all practical purposes, that *the* world is reliably, unquestionably "there." Even though everyday reality informs all experiencing, individuals may give an accent of reality to any world; that is, they may temporarily set aside the familiar reality of the commonsense world in favor of experiences mandating a different cognitive style. They may temporarily abandon their "working" selves for religious, athletic, playgoing, or literary selves. Temporarily displaced from attention are the practicalities of getting on in the world. Yet these "other" realities they temporarily favor are, relative to the paramount reality of everyday life, "quasi-realities."⁸ Though experienced as real, their weight is less massive than that of commonsense givens. Reality in its most assuring and taken-for-granted forms lies in the mundane world of practical affairs. Nevertheless, as Simmel observed, human existence is structured as "a sum of worlds, each of which comprehends . . . existential content in a distinctive form or a form that represents a totality."⁹ Distinctive cognitive

styles thus weave together people's lives, but only the one demanded by everyday life involves feeling fully at home in solid, familiar realities essentially inaccessible to doubt. Not surprisingly, phenomenologists label that cognitive style the "natural attitude."

The Writer's World of Literature

People sharing a world typically take its principal features and apparent purposes for granted, continuously constituting their common world without consciously intending it. As sociologists following Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann put it, human beings socially construct their realities. I prefer the term "constitute" if only because the metaphor "construct" connotes a master plan, a careful effort, and a self-sustaining outcome uncharacteristic of social structures. Central to Husserl's phenomenology, "constitution" concerns how people continuously engage in world making and self making. The concept thus necessitates a focus on human action. Inherently expressive and commonly communicative, human action is unrelentingly constitutive. Only in the world of literature, however, do expression and communication become ends in themselves. Thus, the world of literature simultaneously illuminates the nature of human action, the roots of human worlds, and the interplay of selves in the making.

Human expression is primordial and pervasive. Whenever they act, people inescapably imply something about who they are. Expression is "the passage from interiority to exteriority" through words, gestures, glances, dress, or another medium.¹⁰ Expression is thus the individual's social-psychological fingerprints. Among its forms, the verbal predominates.

People rely heavily on language to constitute their worlds. When they speak and write, they express selves appropriate to their worlds and communicate perceptions sustaining the taken-for-granted stuff of those worlds. Among human worlds, though, only the world of literature makes verbal expression a paramount project. In pursuit of expression writers cultivate the imagination, consciousness exploring possibilities rather than analyzing actualities. At root, a poem, novel, or play expresses its creator's experiences of his or her imagination. That same work may also express its creator's real-life experiences. In *The Mill on the Floss*, for example, George Eliot refashioned some of her childhood experiences, as did Charles Dickens in *David Copperfield*; Henry Miller's early novels refract his years as a young bohemian; Thomas Wolfe wrote novels about his experiences writing and publishing novels. Yet their pasts provide only some of

the experiences captured in novelists' texts. Above all, novelists tell stories as they give expression to their imaginative experiences.

A story emerges when consciousness turns toward the possible and molds its multiplicities into some meaningful shape. Possibility allows for growing up as Maggie Tulliver or David Copperfield, but storytellers obscure the boundary between the possible and the actual. The events in most stories might *actually* have happened or could *possibly* happen. Playing with possible actualities and actual possibilities makes up part of the tension of consciousness writers experience, tension that derives from expressing oneself as an explorer of the conceivable.

Although a story does express an imaginative self, writers' imaginative experiences need not get communicated to readers. Most readers pick up a novel to read a story, not to acquaint themselves with another person's imagination as such. Besides, what novels communicate derives not only from authors' imaginative experiences but also from their responses to narrative conventions, editors' suggestions, friends' feedback, and so forth. Thus, a finished story comprises writers' virtual translations of their imaginative experiences. To that extent novels only refract writers' imaginations much as people's biographies only refract their past experiences.

In a sense every individual narrates a life story as pliable as perception and as malleable as memory. When they write, novelists pursue that commonplace activity with heightened awareness and intensified imagination. As storytellers pursuing a project all human beings face in one way or other, they show us something of ourselves as well as themselves in and through their texts. Unlike people in everyday life, however, imaginative writers exemplify expression, as the idea of art for art's sake implies. Yet such writers do aim to communicate. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it, "The will to speak is one and the same as the will to be understood."¹¹ Again, writers exhibit a fundamental kinship with people in everyday life. Their essential pursuits differ more in degree than in kind from those central to the commonsense world. Their stance toward language is illustrative.

In most worlds people take language for granted, but writers reject that unawareness. The best of them regard words as "the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most unteachable of all things."¹² Such writers probe the essential connections between the structures of verbal expression and the structures of experience. Artistically approached, language becomes an object of reflective consciousness—a mystery, a provocation, a limitation, a liberation. Creative writers dismiss the technological language of preachers, politicians, businesspeople, and scientists. Their language of the imagination,

lacking reliable reference to actual people and situations, exposes the constitutive character of all language by revealing the profusion of possible relations between the activities of human consciousness and the shapes of human worlds.

Strange as such uses of language may seem in other worlds, the world of literature builds up around such meaning-compatible ends. Displaced is the "working self" of everyday life. In its stead stands an imaginative self plying the language capable of shaping a configuration of conceivable people and events into a story. Left behind, then, is "action in the outer world." The imaginative self gives full attention not to the exigencies of everyday life but to an inner world of language-dependent characters and events built out of imagining and remembering. Thus, the actual "intersubjective world of communication and social action" moves to the margins of consciousness. The imagining self has no capacity for worrying about next month's bills, rejoicing in a child's first steps, or planning the syllabus of Creative Writing 301. Such activities catapult the writer back into the world of everyday life.

The sociality of this world is mostly indirect and implicit. The commonsense social world where people greet, flatter, advise, and chat with one another gets subordinated to an imagined world where those sorts of face-to-face interactions routinely occur but only through the musings of the writer's consciousness. In the writer's world "standard time" shares the same fate as the mundane social world. Clocks become bothersome reminders of that "other" world one must reenter on time for a dental appointment or dinner. No longer does the individual suspend doubts about workaday realities either. The creative writer often entertains the very doubts commonsense individuals suspend, as possibilities unthinkable in everyday life yield themselves to the scrutiny of an imagination testing the limits of the conceivable.

The self-experiences of such individuals are thus distinctive, as the next chapter shows. So, too, are their prevalent forms of spontaneity. In the writer's region of the literary world, spontaneity takes shape not from working, as in everyday life, but from whatever activities sustain the imagination. Thus, writers' "eccentricities" are often a measure of the forms their spontaneity can fruitfully take, for example, Ernest Hemingway's habit of standing while writing or Lawrence Durrell's of writing in a windowless room.

The Reader's World of Literature

Historically, literature has often instructed its readers, often through religious works such as *A Pilgrim's Progress*. Less obvious

examples include travel novels that introduced readers to new lands and strange lifestyles or Victorian novels that informed their readers about technical developments. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for instance, acquainted many with the turnip-slicing machine and bright-red thrasher. Until the late nineteenth century, novelists were often willing authorities on such matters.¹³ Contemporary novelists continue that tradition by portraying war, prison life, mental breakdowns, and other experiences foreign to most readers. Writers like Irving Wallace inform millions about such things as the Nobel Prizes (*The Prize*) and biblical archaeology (*The Word*). Experimental and avant-garde writers, insistent that literature illustrates human fictions in general, modernize the age-old notion that literature reveals truth. "In a paradoxical and fugitive way, mimetic theory remains alive."¹⁴

Yet didacticism remains incidental to strong literature. Our best novelists rarely say how to live or what to believe. The modern novel presupposes that human beings must choose among the options they perceive; that they are agents in as well as objects of their societies; that social structures take shape from debates and decisions as well as the resources of environments, the weight of history, and the thrust of technology. Resting on such presuppositions, novels inescapably say something about human freedom.

Literature can thus enliven a sense of possibilities or curtail a sense of inevitability. Reading fiction means transcending the limits of one's biographical situation. At least temporarily, readers extend their realities when they step into an imaginative text. There they find a safe vehicle for exploring unfamiliar territory as well as plowing up the possibilities beneath their familiar tracks. Literature lets readers romp in the fringes of their consciousness by experiencing worlds whose only limits are the possible and the conceivable. Surveying the unfamiliar and the unknown, literature can put readers in imaginative touch with their most distant predecessors, their socially and geographically distant contemporaries, and their imaginable successors; for example, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Paradoxically, literature thus intensifies the hearty accent of reality given to the world of everyday life. By offering forms for exploring the horizon of unfamiliarity (and "unreality") bordering the commonsense world, literature makes individuals' everyday realities seem more solid.

Besides unveiling possibilities and securing realities, literature also heightens self-awareness. Modern literature makes the self its first priority, its standard for evaluating culture.¹⁵ At least surreptitiously,

literature underscores each person's need for expression and recognition. At the same time it lets readers experience and express intense emotions unashamedly, granting temporary release from the emotional limits of everyday life. Sometimes it "makes us realize for the first time how we feel . . .," opening us "to the dark side of our deepest ambivalence toward violence, sex, parents, mates, children, selves, toward the daylight deities we are proud to boast we honor alone."¹⁶

Literature also offers its devotees intense experiences of beauty—not "mere prettiness but something possessed of the power to rend one's heart."¹⁷ For readers, literature is a pleasure-filled, though sometimes demanding, respite from everyday life. The poignant, the lyrical, the awesome, the wondrous, the beautiful—these are the fine threads of literature. Consider daylight, for instance:

The sun was rising. Very slowly, it came up over the horizon shaking out light.

The clouds themselves are moving to reveal enormous cavities of sky. They peel the morning like a fruit.

The sky was blue and serene, as though it had never known a tear.

In the evenings she liked to look seaward and see that perfectly round sphere sinking to meet that perfectly straight line.

That enormous smoldering sun lay on the horizon like a dissolving orange suffused with blood.¹⁸

No less than writers, readers of literature exhibit a distinctive cognitive style. Enjoying literature displaces the working self and action in the outer world; attention shifts from the actual to the imaginary; workaday matters become unwelcome intrusions. For a while, sociality is indirect and implicit, though sometimes experienced more intensely than in everyday life; temporarily, an imaginary world governs time-consciousness. Doubts necessarily suspended in everyday life may find safe harbor in the text, and experiences unavailable in one's biographical situation become imaginatively accessible.

To deny people's need for that luxuriantly imaginative world is to deny them their full humanity. The values, the human voices, the tragedies and comedies and romances of the literary world address individuals' needs as surely as those same human realities in their nonartistic forms do. In both cases needs may remain frustrated, appear impossible to satisfy, or find brief fulfillment only to cry out

again for satisfaction. Yet human beings persist, as it seems they must, in their quests for meaning and values, for connections with the Other, and for their very own stories comprising unpredictable amalgams of tears, laughs, and something felt to be love. We are only beginning to appreciate art as "a self-renewing, life-restoring force" capable in the extreme of literally saving lives.¹⁹ In times of great or small need, literature (and the other arts) is responsive with a generosity of spirit sometimes hard to find among the breathing beings in one's world.

At the cultural level, literature serves collective needs often unrecognized and, therefore, unexpressed in any straightforward way. Indirectly, often unintentionally, imaginative writers shape our cultural iconography, planting in the social stock of knowledge such figures as Frankenstein and Dracula, Jekyll/Hyde, Huck Finn, Hester Prynne, Stephen Daedalus, Gatsby, Kunta Kinte, and Garp. Whatever our secular mythologies, literature is certain to have shaped them. It is more than a precious part of our cultural capital, to use Simmel's metaphor; literature vivifies our cultural inheritance.

The Sociology of Literature

Even though literary critics congregate in schools with different frames of reference, the critical pluralism of Wayne C. Booth makes more sense.²⁰ So does Lionel Trilling's insistence that "criticism may use any instrument upon a work of art to find its meanings."²¹ Despite their open-ended stances Booth and Trilling, like most critics, do subscribe to some version of the autonomy of literature. Literary critics largely agree

that a poem or novel has properties distinctive to itself; that such a work must be perceived, analyzed, and judged with categories distinctive to its kind; that it is an imaginative verbal composition, which cannot be reduced to other kinds of communication since it involves a use of language different from the ways language may be used in exposition, argument, or exhortation. . . . Difficulties arise when we try to discover the relations between this literary work and the external world of familiar experience.²²

The sociology of literature confronts precisely those difficulties.

Historically, sociologists of literature have favored social realities as a starting point and then examined how literature distorts or reflects those realities. They often reduced literature to a cultural data

base used to illustrate what they claimed they already knew or to show how literary works refract the social worlds of their authors. The former purposes were (and remain) mostly pedagogical, best illustrated by Lewis Coser's *Sociology Through Literature*. The latter purposes mostly move sociologists of culture. An impressive work in that vein is Elizabeth Long's *The American Dream and the American Novel*, which traces shifting models of success in post-World War II works. Both sets of purposes are worthy, but neither approaches literature as a full-fledged world or a social institution *sui generis*. In the aggregate, literature has usually gotten second-class treatment in the hands of sociologists—treatment different from that accorded to religion, law, science, and other worlds where print and codification are central. As a result, the sociology of literature has estranged literary critics and stymied its own development.

Somewhere between the exclusionary posture of some literary critics and the reductive approaches of some sociologists lies a sociology capable of illuminating literature as a social world. Such a sociology would refuse, as some literary critics do, to treat literary works as "complex but essentially self-contained forms, cut off from the untidiness and discontinuities of the world outside."²³ Its principal focus would be the varieties of language, form, and social action that make literature a world whose participants exhibit distinctive cognitive styles.

Such a sociology of literature is already emerging. During the 1980s the sociology of culture began moving toward the forefront of American sociology. Its proponents—sociologists like Wendy Griswold and Gaye Tuchman—often approach literature as a world rather than a refractory institution. Renewed concern with rhetoric, exemplified in the work of Richard Harvey Brown, invites attention to the cognitive styles necessitated by different sorts of narratives. Ethnomethodologists continue to feed awareness of how widely commonsense reasoning serves as a resource; not only school counselors and jurors but also sociologists and coroners—and, one supposes, novelists—use it. Feminist scholarship encourages the emergence of a more ambitious sociology of literature, too. Evelyn Fox Keller's findings about the infiltration of gender stereotypes into the natural sciences is but one example of work stimulating attention to the cultural boundaries dividing fact from fiction and science from art. All these developments concern language, narrative forms, and the constitution of culture. The times, it seems, are favorable for a seriously interdisciplinary, conspicuously creative sociology of literature.

Yet some scholars may deem literature relatively undeserving of

attention in the face of staggering social injustices. That concern with beauty can take no moral precedence over concern with human indignities goes without saying. What needs reiterating, however, is that literature lives on human expression and communication. Only in the literary world does the expressive, communicative nature of human beings expose itself more or less purely. If one wants to understand human expression and communication, one can find no more promising place.

Expression and communication are the human activities that provide for social action, at least in Max Weber's sense, and thus for social structure and culture. Moreover, these activities are as central to individuality as the body itself: Each human being has an utterly unique voice. These, then, are the activities ultimately at issue when we brand a state of affairs a social problem. The human rights of the poor, women and minorities, lesbians and gay men, children, the handicapped, prisoners, and everyone else fundamentally revolve around the right to express one's self and to have one's voice effectively heard and taken into account. Put differently, in one form or another silencing lies at the root of oppressing.

Does it not behoove us to make every effort to understand human expression and communication—to expose their roots so as to better understand social structure, culture, social problems, and social change? All these standing concerns of sociologists presuppose social action, and no action is fully social unless it expresses something about its agent and communicates something to one or more human beings. Sociologists needing to understand expression and communication will experience beauty and wonder as they study literature in order to satisfy that need. At the same time they will find inexhaustible grounds for illuminating the human capacity to constitute complex, shared worlds.

Clearly, a sociology of literature cannot embrace all literary forms at the outset. Theodor Adorno rightly insists it must treat poetry;²⁴ it must also consider plays and short stories. As the sociology of literature takes fresh shape, however, its most fruitful focus is the novel, in part because sociologists of literature already concentrate on that genre. Most of all, though, the novel offers the optimal starting point because of its generic characteristics.

The novel offers a unique "summary and paradigm of our cultural life." It shows "the look and feel of things, how things are done and what things are worth and what they cost and what the odds are."²⁵ The novel portrays complex worlds not unlike those ethnographic sociologists study. Both novelists and social scientists use nar-

rative forms to tap "a culture's hum and buzz of implication."²⁶ Both reject appearances as reliable indicators of character, motives, experiences, or even reality. The modern novel shows how people constitute their realities together and how experiences shift with expectations, situations, and vocabularies. Characteristically, then, the novel not only creates but also depicts illusions.²⁷ Similarly, sociology is a debunking, skeptical discipline that insists things are not what they seem. Like the literary imagination, the sociological one reveals "the extent of human variety and the value of this variety."²⁸ The connections between individual and group, self and culture, and biography and history concern both novelists and social scientists. Those commonalities make the novel the best point of departure for a sociology of literature focused on the fundamentals of human action—expression and communication.

On Method and Meaning

Working with literary data taxes the sociological imagination. Reducing those data to numbers destroys their distinctive character; treating them like ethnographic or conversational data carries the same risk. Literary data rest on distinctive uses of language and constitute aesthetic wholes, imposing on sociologists the clumsiness of quotation marks, the weight of huge volume, and the insufficiency of sampling (among other things).

The problem of quotation marks is largely aesthetic, a punctuational testament to the recalcitrance of literary data. One cannot paraphrase novelists' most valuable achievements the way survey researchers summarize their subjects' opinions. Paradoxically, working with literary data imposes severe aesthetic problems. Perhaps the aesthetic satisfactions of the data themselves soften the blunt blows of quotation marks, ellipses, and other punctuational paraphernalia.

The volume of data necessary to support generalizations about literature pits evidence against aesthetics. Literary critics decide that battle in favor of aesthetics, for the most part favoring depth over breadth by focusing on one novelist or a handful of novels. Although it does provide keen insights into specific novelists, novels, or literary periods, literary critics' usual method refuses to yield the sorts of evidence deemed necessary for sociological generalizations. Yet the wide-ranging data necessary for generalizing leave the sociologist overwhelmed by sheer volume. One way out is a variety of what André de Muralt calls "Husserlian exemplarism." As I use it, that method entails examining a broad range of literary data and then

illustrating that range with instances exemplifying the many cases at hand. That approach does deflate the evidential force commonly supposed to underlie sociological explanation, but its breadth offsets that deflation, much as the tradition of ideal-type analysis in the social sciences does.

The sociologist of literature nevertheless faces the methodological problem of sampling. Routinely, it would seem, random sampling of some population of literary works represents a cultural travesty. Literary data have an irreplaceable character seldom found among other data that interest sociologists. Here random sampling eventuates in the very biases such sampling was meant to short-circuit. If one draws a large enough random sample in order to survey a population on some issue, for example, Jane Doe's absence from the sample means that some socially equivalent respondent will offer responses comparable to those she would have provided. Yet no other novelist offers data equivalent to those offered by a Virginia Woolf, a William Faulkner, or a Toni Morrison. Sampling literary works requires sketching broad boundaries and insistently including all the widely read and/or critically acclaimed writers whose work gives those boundaries literary and cultural meaning.

In the end, sociologists of literature face exhilarating methodological challenges that fuel the imagination, revitalizing one's sense of possibilities while tempering the dreariness of mere probabilities. At the same time, such challenges demand interdisciplinary responses that are philosophically self-conscious and sociologically open-ended; hence, phenomenology and grounded theory.

Phenomenology insists on philosophical self-consciousness devoted to "things themselves" as presented to consciousness. Phenomenological method requires acutely reflective attention to one's own consciousness—both its noetic activities such as perceiving, judging, and remembering and its noematic objects such as *Beloved*-as-appreciated, narrator-as-inferred, and reading-as-remembered. Phenomenological findings show that consciousness offers our sole access to "reality," that consciousness is constitutive of taken-for-granted "realities," that what-is-taken-as-real readily undergoes experiential translation into what-is-real. Phenomenologically guided, self-consciousness entails world-consciousness; that is, consciousness of language as a social repository of types, of history as a continuous influence on social structure, of culture as a collectively constituted achievement, of individuals' biographies as dramas played out on a panoramic stage where countless characters dance and cry and grow old together. Preoccupied with the amplitude of human experiencing

and the achievements of human consciousness, phenomenology offers the most fruitful grounds for my project. Phenomenologists investigate intersubjectivity, meaning, typification, the self, and the worlds that individuals constitute together out of shared projects, similar plans, and common sense. Phenomenology discloses what taken for grantedness hides and what taking for granted entails.

A sociological approach particularly compatible with phenomenology is what Barney Glaser and Anselm S. Strauss call "grounded theory" (most recently delineated in the latter's *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*). Rudimentary as it is, grounded theory is nonetheless systematic. In Strauss's terms, it grants no "license to run wild." Grounded theory revolves around progressive interpretations that require revisiting one's data until one nearly sickens of them. (Implicitly, then, it urges the selection of research problems one genuinely cares about.) One's interpretations self-consciously evolve; one's conclusions take shape as "provisional suggestions."

Grounded theory entails *theoretical sampling* governed not by probabilistic models but by one's evolving theoretical stance based on interpretations and reinterpretations of the data constituted out of sampling. The goal is *theoretical saturation*—arrival at the point where neither further data nor further analyses elicit additional insights of any theoretical import. In practical terms, that goal is unattainable in an undertaking like this. Nevertheless, it can serve as a reference point capable of signaling semi-closure.

"Experiential data" play a central role in grounded theory. These derive from the researcher's nontechnical experiences rooted beyond the world of science, outside the role of scientist. In a project like *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* such data comprise memories of the summer reading clubs at the Alton public library during the 1950s, my experiences first reading *Pride and Prejudice* in high school, the "Tom Wolfe phase" my friend Helen and I shared after reading *Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, or the emotionally exhausting, aesthetically overpowering wonder of reading *Beloved*. Traditionally, scientists have denied the play of such experiences beneath the surface of their work. Grounded theory releases them from that denial. It warrants the self-conscious, disciplined (and satisfying) use of such experiences in one's work—a use as unavoidable as it is deniable among scientists in any event.

Finally, grounded theory is "conceptually dense." It gives way to many concepts, some old and some not, that assert themselves as the researcher keeps reencountering the data at hand. Here, concepts like world, debunking, tension of consciousness, system of rele-

vances, literary canon, expressive language, strategic interaction, genre, culture, and mediating institution kept demanding attention. I repeatedly gave it to them while foreshortening any temptation to pretend I could do more than enrich their meaning. To be literally definitive here would be to miss my own points. Besides, as Raymond Boudon observes in *The Crisis in Sociology*, the most successful sociological concepts are often the most "polysemic." Conceptual density—minus any conceptual proliferation serving no theoretical end—would seem theoretically advantageous at all junctures in the scholarly enterprise. In exploratory works it is essential.

My progression is thus bound by what I take phenomenology and grounded theory to demand. I know no better way to rouse my imagination and discipline my energies in the face of a world that incessantly claims my attention. Differently put, I subordinate broadly Marxian stances centered on reflection models of literature, the art-worlds perspective of Howard S. Becker, the production-of-culture framework of Richard Peterson, and related stances to phenomenological findings and grounded-theory guidelines in order to find my way to insights that extant perspectives tend to foreshorten.