

P A R T I

Poetry is capable of saving us.

I. A. Richards

It is a deadly error to expect poetry
to provide the supersubstantial nour-
ishment of men.

Jacques Maritain

To the aesthetic temperament noth-
ing seems ugly. There are degrees of
beauty—that is all.

Max Beerbohm

Beethoven's Fourth Symphony nour-
ishes the soul.

Igor Stravinsky

A book [of prose fiction] at the time [it
is written] is a good or bad action.

Jean-Paul Sartre

RELOCATING ETHICAL CRITICISM

One ought to be able to hold in one's head simultaneously the two facts that Dali is a good draughtsman and a disgusting human being. . . . The first thing we demand of a wall is that it shall stand up. If it stands up, it is a good wall, and the question of what purpose it serves is separable from that. And yet even the best wall in the world deserves to be pulled down if it surrounds a concentration camp.

George Orwell

"What takes place" in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; "what happens" is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming.

Roland Barthes

Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.

. . . The "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.

T. S. Eliot

A work of art is . . . a bridge, however tenuous, between one mind and another.

Andrew Harrison

[Art] is civilization's single most significant device for learning what must be affirmed and what must be denied.

John Gardner

Introduction

Ethical Criticism, a Banned Discipline?

Twenty-five years ago at The University of Chicago, a minor scandal shocked the members of the humanities teaching staff as they discussed the texts to be assigned to the next batch of entering students. *Huckleberry Finn* had been on the list for many years, and the general assumption was that it would be on the list once again. But suddenly the one black member of the staff, Paul Moses, an assistant professor of art, committed what in that context seemed an outrage: an overt, serious, uncompromising act of ethical criticism. As his story was reported in corridors and over coffee in the lounges it went something like this:

It's hard for me to say this, but I have to say it anyway. I simply can't teach *Huckleberry Finn* again. The way Mark Twain portrays Jim is so offensive to me that I get angry in class, and I can't get all those liberal white kids to understand why I am angry. What's more, I don't think it's right to subject students, black or white, to the many distorted views of race on which that book is based. No, it's not the word "nigger" I'm objecting to, it's the whole range of assumptions about slavery and its consequences, and about how whites should deal with liberated slaves, and how liberated slaves should behave or will behave toward whites, good ones and bad ones. That book is just bad education, and the fact that it's so cleverly written makes it even more troublesome to me.

All of his colleagues were offended: obviously Moses was violating academic norms of objectivity. For many of us, this was the first experience with anyone inside the academy who considered a literary work so dangerous that it should not be assigned to students. We had assumed that only "outsiders"—those enemies of culture, the censors—talked that way about art. I can remember lamenting the shoddy education that had left poor Paul Moses unable to recognize a great classic when he met one. Had he not even noticed that Jim is of all the characters closest to the moral center? Moses obviously could neither read properly nor think properly about what questions might be relevant to judging a novel's worth.

The Company We Keep can perhaps best be described as an effort to discover why that still widespread response to Paul Moses's sort of complaint will not do. Though I would of course resist anyone who tried to ban the book from *my* classroom, I shall argue here that Paul Moses's reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, an overt ethical appraisal, is one legitimate form of literary criticism. Such appraisals are always difficult and always controversial; those modern critics who banned them, at least in theory, from the house of criticism had good reason to fear what they too often spawn when practiced by zealots. Anyone who attempts to invite ethical criticism back into the front parlor, to join more fashionable, less threatening varieties, must know from the beginning that no simple, definitive conclusions lie ahead. I shall not, in my final chapter, arrive at a comfortable double column headed "Ethically Good" and "Ethically Bad." But if the powerful stories we tell each other really matter to us—and even the most skeptical theorists imply by their *practice* that stories do matter—then a criticism that takes their "mattering" seriously cannot be ignored.

Our lengthy, heated, and confused debates with Paul Moses never, as I recall, honored his claim that teachers should concern themselves with what a novel might *do* to a student. Though as good liberals the staff members of the course granted him his request to substitute another novel in his own section, we all went on believing that he was wrong. We had been trained to treat a "poem *as* poem and not another thing" and to believe that the value of a great work of fiction was something much subtler than any idea or proposition derived from it or used to paraphrase its "meaning." We knew that sophisticated critics never judge a fiction by any effect it might have on readers. "Poetry," we were fond of quoting to each other, "makes nothing happen," and we included under "poetry" all prose works that qualified as "genuine literature." To have attended to Paul Moses's complaint would have been to commit—in the jargon of the time—the "affective fallacy."

Paradoxically, none of this interfered with our shared conviction that *good literature in general* was somehow as vital to the lives of our students as it was to us. To turn them into "readers," and to get them to read the good stuff was our mission. "Trash," "kitsch," "time killers," "popular fictions"—these were another matter entirely; one might even on occasion pass a *moral* judgment on stories of these base

kinds, though generally one would, like Edmund Wilson in his attack on detective stories, make one's judgment sound as purely "artistic" as possible (1944, 1945).

After the debate cooled, I suspect that most of my colleagues did what I did; we not only went on believing that *Huckleberry Finn* is a great work (Chapter 13 below will reveal that I still see it as superb), but we continued to resist discussion, in class or in print, of the twin questions that seemed to us blatantly *non-literary*: Is this "poem" morally, politically, or philosophically sound? and, Is it likely to work for good or ill in those who read it? If we knew of critics who questioned our happy abstract formalism—Yvor Winters, F. R. Leavis, the Marxists—we considered them dogmatic mavericks, either the last remnants of a moralistic, pre-aesthetic past or the would-be forerunners of a totalitarian revolution.

Many critics today still resist any effort to tie "art" to "life," the "aesthetic" to the "practical." Indeed, when I began this project I thought that ethical criticism was as unfashionable as most current theories would lead one to expect. When I first read, three or four years along in my drafting, Fredric Jameson's claim in *The Political Unconscious* that the predominant mode of criticism in our time is the ethical (1981, 59), I thought he was just plain wrong. But as I have looked further, I have had to conclude that he is quite right. I'm thinking here not only of the various new overtly ethical and political challenges to "formalism": by feminist critics asking embarrassing questions about a male-dominated literary canon and what it has done to the "consciousness" of both men and women; by black critics pursuing Paul Moses's kind of question about racism in American classics; by neo-Marxists exploring class biases in European literary traditions; by religious critics attacking modern literature for its "nihilism" or "atheism." I am thinking more of the way in which even those critics who work hard to purge themselves of all but the most abstract formal interests turn out to have an ethical program in mind—a belief that a given way of reading, or a given kind of genuine literature, is what will do us most good.

The practice of ethical criticism may be as clumsy as that of the old-style moralists and censors who would ban Kurt Vonnegut because of the word "fuck," or the movie version of *The Color Purple* because it paints an "unfair" picture of the violence of black males. It may be as

highly sophisticated, oblique, and seemingly unconcerned with traditional moral interests as Frank Kermode's complaint that a book "exhibits the same sort of crafted mendacity" that is shown in the blurb on its jacket: the author is too "knowing," and "there are things one ought to know about without being knowing about" (1981, 17). The practice may confirm my own opinions about an author's viciousness, as when Susan Suleiman, writing of the anti-Semitic work of Drieu La Rochelle, concludes that its ideology is a blot on its art (1976; 1983, 190–93). Or it may challenge them, as when Chinua Achebe concludes that Conrad's *Lord Jim* is racist (1975), or Michael Sprinker concludes that the same work is a defense of bourgeois capitalism (1988). The practice may inadvertently be a bit comic, as when James Watt declares that the Beach Boys play an immoral music that will attract "the wrong element" to the White House Fourth of July celebration; or it may be illuminating and deeply moving, as when Bruno Bettelheim argues that Lina Wertmüller's use of the Holocaust in her movie *Seven Beauties* is corrupt and potentially corrupting (1979, 274–314). But no one seems to resist ethical criticism for long.

Whenever any human practice refuses to die, in spite of centuries of assault from theory, there must be something wrong with the theory. At the School of Criticism in 1979 (held that summer at the University of California, Irvine), a young teacher told us that he felt an irreconcilable gap between the critical theories he had been taught and his absolute need to protest the stereotypes of "the Chicano" that he met in much modern American fiction. In theory, he had been insistently told, his political beliefs and his gut reactions should be irrelevant to what he says about a novel. In practice, he refused to be silent about such matters. "But," he concluded, "I feel guilty about it, and I'm always afraid that my mentors will want to throw me out of the profession if I talk about what matters most to me."

I've had similar conversations with feminist and black scholars who have wondered whether, in order to say what they want to say about works they "personally" admire or detest, they must either renounce literary theory or induce the academy to legitimate a "fusion of theory and praxis." The criticism of the best new Marxists is indeed one good way to address the problems I am raising (Williams 1977; Jameson 1981; Eagleton 1976). But I hope before we are done here to have shown that there are many legitimate paths open to anyone who de-

cides to abandon, at least for a time, the notion that an interest in form precludes an interest in the ethical powers of form.

Such a project need not lead to a flat rejection of the insights characteristic of either “side” in the prolonged war between the formalists/aestheticians and the critics who appraise art’s social function. Nor need we choose sides in the recent redrawing of battle lines between deconstructionists (as “formalists” who seem to argue that literary works, nothing more than texts or systems of signs, refer to no “reality” other than themselves and other texts) and ardent defenders of a vital connection between literary experience and the lives of readers (e.g., Graff 1979, 1987; Goodheart 1984; Fischer 1985).¹ The exaggerations of the more extreme moralists,² like the “totalizing” claims of some post-structuralists, might drive one to seek some other line of honest work. But before retreating from the field, we might try to discover new locations for our debates. After all, life itself is what produces and enjoys art—and is in turn blessed or blasted by it. Defenders of ethical and other ideological criticism have rightly deplored the temptation of purists and “textualists” to ignore the real ethical and political effects of even the purest artistic form. Defenders of aesthetic purity have rightly deplored the temptation of moralists to judge narratives by standards they might use in teaching a Sunday school class or conducting a court for juvenile offenders; “art” does offer us riches entirely its own, unrivaled by any other part of “life.” If ethical criticism of narrative is once again to find a place for itself, it must avoid the loaded labels and crude slogans that critics preoccupied with moral effects have too often employed.

Such complexities only begin to suggest the difficulties in the way of pursuing an “ethical criticism of narrative,” an “ethics of telling and listening.” In the first place, every term we might use in the inquiry is

1. Neither “side” in the literary battles about “referentiality” seems to be much aware of the extended discussion among professional philosophers, not about *whether* texts refer, but about *how* they do. See, for example, Putnam 1981, ch. 2; Linsky 1967; and Pavel 1986, esp. the bibliography.

2. I am thinking especially of the courageous but careless *On Moral Fiction*, by John Gardner (1978). Gardner labels many novels as “bad” or “pernicious” or “corrupt,” but he never pauses for long enough on any one work to let us know how he arrives at his often surprising judgments.

either muddled with ambiguities or barnacled with fixed conclusions. What I mean by the ethical criticism of narrative (both “fictional” and “historical”) cannot be nicely confined in any preliminary definitions; it will be shown more by what I do than by anything I can say. But I must briefly forestall some of the more likely misunderstandings of my key terms.

“ETHICAL,” “CHARACTER,” AND “VIRTUE”

The word “ethical” may mistakenly suggest a project concentrating on quite limited moral standards: of honesty, perhaps, or of decency or tolerance. I am interested in a much broader topic, the entire range of effects on the “character” or “person” or “self.” “Moral” judgments are only a small part of it.

What is more misleading, “ethical” tends to refer only to the approved side of the choices it suggests. An ethical choice is for many strictly the right choice, the opposite of “unethical,” just as a moral choice is the opposite of an immoral choice. For us here the word must cover all qualities in the character, or ethos, of authors and readers, whether these are judged as good or bad. Since we have no other term for this range of appraisals (“characterological criticism”? “psychic criticism”? “behavioral criticism”? “temperamental criticism”? “personality criticism”?), “ethical” must serve.³

From ancient Greece to the present, the word “ethos” has meant something like “character” or “collection of habitual characteristics”: whatever in a person or a society could be counted on to persist from situation to situation. I express my ethos, my character, by my habits of choice in every domain of my life, and a society expresses its ethos by what it chooses to be. Ethical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a story-teller’s ethos with that of the reader or listener. Ethical critics need not begin with the intent to evaluate, but their descriptions will always entail appraisals of the value of what is described: there are no neutral ethical terms, and a fully responsible ethical criti-

3. The bibliographies of literary studies reveal a striking decline, in the later twentieth century, in titles that include terms like “moral” and “ethical”; “character” as an ethical term (in contrast to a “literary character”) has almost disappeared. We may, however, be on the verge of a revival; see Handwerk 1985; Coles 1981.

cism will make explicit those appraisals that are implicit whenever a reader or listener reports on stories about human beings in action.

"Ethical" may also wrongly suggest an interest only in judging stories and their effects on readers. That is indeed one center for ethical criticism, but I intend the term to suggest also the ethics *of* readers—their responsibilities *to* stories. Too often in the past, "ethical" or "moral" critics have assumed that their only responsibility was to label a given narrative or kind of narrative as in itself harmful or beneficial—often dismissing entire genres, like "the novel," in one grand indictment.

In recent years critics have rightly begun to place more responsibility on readers, but in doing so they have, perhaps naturally, exaggerated that move, developing an "ethics of reading" that often underplays the radically contrasting ethical powers of individual narratives. One major critic, J. Hillis Miller, has made that ethics explicit, in *The Ethics of Reading*:

I remain with Benjamin at the end where and as I was at the beginning of this book and where and as I have remained with Kant, Kafka, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, and James. I still stand before *the* law of *the* ethics of reading, subject to it, compelled by it, persuaded of its existence and sovereignty by what happens to me when I read. What happens is the experience of an "I must" that is always the same but always different, unique, idiomatic.⁴

(1986, 127; my italics)

It may well be true that to learn to read in some one superior way has an ethical value in itself, regardless of what we read. When that general claim becomes our whole interest, however, we lose all the va-

4. I asked Hillis Miller, after he read a conference paper on how his "law" worked in his reading of James's *What Maisie Knew*, whether he would not have received the same ethical lesson—something like "do not expect any specific moral instruction from *me*"—from any novel that he read properly; his answer was that of course it would be the same lesson! One must be careful, however, to respect the way in which Miller brings particular differences into his account: the "I must," he says, though always "the same," is always encountered as "different, unique, idiomatic" (1986, 127). In an unpublished paper Miller makes an even stronger claim to respect particularities: "One cannot make ethical judgments, perform ethical actions, such as teaching a poem, without first subjecting oneself to the words on the page. . . . The ethics of reading is the power of the words of the text over the mind and words of the reader" (1980, 30–31). Gary Saul Morson argues that we should have the courage to raise ethical questions even about the greatest of classics, and that Dostoevsky, when pressed, must be found ethically duplicitous, since, for example, he attempts to condemn a kind of destructive voyeurism in human nature, while exploiting that same voyeurism for his literary effects (1988, 1–14).

riety of ethical effect that will be our chief interest here. Still, with that qualification, I would join those who care as much about the ethics of reading as about the ethical value of “works in themselves,” whatever we take such problematic creatures to be. (I return to the “work in itself” in Chapter 4.)

For any individual reader, the only story that will have ethical power is the one that is heard or read *as* it is heard or read—and that may have little connection either with the author’s original intention or with the inherent powers of the story-as-told.⁵ The ethics of reading that results when we take this fact of life seriously will itself have a double edge: the ethical reader will behave responsibly toward the text and its author, but that reader will also take responsibility for the ethical quality of his or her “reading,” once that new “text” is made public. If ethical criticism is to be worth pursuing, it will itself carry powerful ethical force and thus be subject to ethical criteria.

Finally, to talk about ethics may falsely suggest that we are interested only in the “*after-effects*,” with what is revealed in conduct following experience with a story. Though I turn to consequences for conduct in Chapter 8, my main effort is to find ways of talking about the ethical quality of the experience of narrative in itself. What kind of company are we keeping as we read or listen? What kind of company have we kept?

“Virtue” may be similarly misleading. In trying to talk about the qualities of character that are engaged in and affected by our experience with narratives, we need a general term. I have had to settle for “virtue,” even though, like “moral,” it has in most modern use been narrowed almost out of recognition. Traditionally it meant something like the whole range of human “powers,” “strengths,” “capacities,” or “habits of behavior.” Thus an “ethical” effect here, as in pre-modern discourse, can refer to any strengthening or weakening of a “virtue,” including those that you or I would consider immoral; a given virtue can be employed viciously.⁶

5. For those who carry the case for subjectivism further than this phrasing implies and doubt that stories have any power in themselves considered apart from a particular reading, I offer in Chapters 2 and 4 a variety of reasons to question currently fashionable versions of “utter interpretational relativism.”

6. For commentary on these broader definitions, see Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.1–17 (esp. the summary in 18), and MacIntyre 1981: “The word *areté*, which later comes to

Expanding our terms in this way exposes the falseness of any sharp divorce of aesthetic and ethical questions. If "virtue" covers every kind of genuine strength or power, and if a person's ethos is the total range of his or her virtues, then ethical criticism will be any effort to show how the virtues of narratives relate to the virtues of selves and societies, or how the ethos of any story affects or is affected by the ethos—the collection of virtues—of any given reader. Obviously this means that a critic will be doing ethical criticism just as much when praising a story or poem for "raising our aesthetic sensibilities" or "increasing our sensitivity" as when attacking decadence, sexism, or racism. Even a work that has seemed to most readers a manifesto for art-for-art's-sake—Oscar Wilde's essay "The Decay of Lying," for example—will be taken as ethical criticism if we can discern in it a program for improving us in any way or a judgment that some works of art may debase us. "Lying," Wilde says, "the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art" ([1891] 1982, 320). Many have naturally read this and similar statements throughout Wilde's work as disparaging all ethical concern. But it takes no very deep reading to discover that Wilde's aim is to create a better kind of person—the kind who will look at the world and at art in a superior way and conduct life accordingly.

What is more, Wilde's ethical program extends beyond reform of individuals to whole societies and epochs.

Ours is certainly the dullest and most prosaic century possible[,] . . . commonplace, sordid, and tedious. . . . The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is . . . Lying in Art. . . . The solid stolid British intellect lies in the desert sands like the Sphinx in Flaubert's marvellous tale, and fantasy, *La Chimère*, dances round it, and calls to it with her false, flute-toned voice. It may not hear her now, but surely some day . . . it will hearken to her and try to borrow her wings.

(316, 317, 318)

If only people will listen to him, he goes on, reject literature that attempts to further "morality" and "truth," and thus promote *his* kind of

be translated as 'virtue,' is in the Homeric poems used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays the *areté* of his feet . . . and a son excels his father in every kind of *areté*—that is, capacity or power or strength (115). See also Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985, chs. 1–3, esp. 6–13); Warner Berthoff, *Literature and the Continuances of Virtue* (1986, esp. ch. 1 and the afterword); and J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtues, Commerce, and History* (1985, esp. 41–50).

character and virtue (words he tends to avoid or mock), then a new day will dawn, when “romance, with her temper of wonder, will return to the land” (320). Now *there* is an ethical critic!—one who would use literature and criticism to improve both selves and societies.⁷

Wilde’s way of talking shows why a serious ethical criticism cannot be divorced finally from political criticism. When we talk about changing persons we are also talking about changing societies. As most philosophers from Plato and Aristotle on have insisted, ethics and politics depend on each other. We might, then, broaden the term “ethical” even further, making it carry the weight of all political criticism as a rough synonym for what many people would call ideological criticism. I must often use it in that broad sense, but although I raise political issues throughout, I cannot pretend to offer the full encounter with them that the enterprise inherently demands.

Ethical criticism will also encompass what many would consider “philosophical” criticism: appraisals of the truth-value of narratives. “Ideological” might have served as the best term here; indeed in one draft I called the book by the stolid title “Ideology and Form.” But for most American readers the word “ideology” still carries too many connotations of the narrowly doctrinaire (ideologues and fanatics have *ideologies*; our acquaintances have *ideals*; but you and I, friends, have *reasoned convictions*). I must make frequent forays into philosophical territory, but my focus will be on authors and readers as characters, and on how the transactions between them rely upon, implant, or reinforce such-and-such virtues. That focus will frequently lead to judgments that turn out to be at least to some degree indifferent to the truths or falsehoods expressed or implied in narratives.

The alternative to using “ethical,” “character,” and “virtue” in this unfashionable way would have been neologism. Would anyone wish that I had chosen to call this study “the axiology of psycho- and politico-poiesis as it is problematized by narratology”?

7. Only after this book was in press did I discover, in Richard Ellmann’s *Oscar Wilde*, a similar claim that Wilde subsumed the “aesthetic” under the “ethical.” In impressively detailed argument, Ellmann traces Wilde’s lifelong pursuit of a “higher ethics” (1988, 300–359, esp. 302–5), one that would show how “art” indeed serves a higher form of “life.” For Wilde, Ellmann claims, the “artistic life is a guide to conduct. Gide was to complain in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* that symbolism offered an aesthetic but no

“NARRATIVE”

Though my main interest is in published “stories,” “fictions,” (see next sub-heading), I cannot draw a consistently sharp line between those stories that are explicitly fictional and those that purport to be true, or between those that are “didactic” and those that are “artistic” or “mimetic.” In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, to keep the project manageable, I dealt primarily with “non-didactic fiction”—stories that had survived as “works of art” in the public winnowing of previous decades. That winnowing distinguished sharply between “serious” narratives that were “genuine art” and “lighter” works that compromised art by turning to “propaganda,” or “rhetoric,” or “didactic intent.” It seems obvious, when we turn to consider ethical criticism, that such categorical divisions will have only a limited use. Indeed, most of what I said about “the rhetorical resources available to the writer of epic, novel, or short story as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader” (1983, xiii) applies without radical change to all other narratives, regardless of whether they seem, to a formal critic, to fall outside the category of “art.”

The relevance of ethical criticism in no way depends on whether a story is overtly didactic, or on whether it claims to report on events in “real life.” As Louise Rosenblatt argues in her unfortunately neglected work *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), readers can create for themselves two quite different kinds of experience with *any* work, regardless of its formal or rhetorical intentions. She chooses to replace the distinction between didactic and non-didactic fictions with the distinction between aesthetic reading “transactions” and what she calls “efferent transactions”—that is, readings that are motivated mainly by a search for something to “carry away.” For some readers, fiction even of the least didactic kind will be read “efferently”—that is, in the search either for some practical guidance, or for some special wisdom, or for some other useful “carry-over” into non-fictional life. For some other readers, even the most aggressively didactic authors can be turned into

ethic. Wilde brought the two together before Gide” (359). Ellmann’s argument is perhaps most likely to surprise the world in his discussion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and of Wilde’s ambiguous embrace of French decadence.

an aesthetic transaction, just as time can occasionally transform a work like *Gulliver's Travels*, originally loaded with didactic freight, into a children's story, read for the sheer fun of the fantastic adventure.

Ethical criticism will be interested in both kinds of experience—those in which the reader's attention is entirely on the present experience, taking no thought for the morrow, and those in which the attention is specifically on efferent freight. Indeed, the actual consequences, the load of values carried away from the experience, can often be most substantial when the reader has been least conscious of anything other than “aesthetic” involvement.

In principle, then, my subject must be all narratives, not only novels, short stories, epics, plays, films, and TV dramas but all histories, all satires, all documentaries, all gossip and personal anecdote, all biography and autobiography, all “storied” ballets and operas, all mimes and puppet shows, all chronicles—indeed, every presentation of a time-ordered or time-related experience that in any way supplements, re-orders, enhances, or interprets unnarrated life. (A complete ethical criticism of “narrative” would obviously also include most music, perhaps even, as Plato insisted, all music; and it would just as obviously include all “narrative” graphic art, since, as many have argued, images carry more powerful ethical force than do verbal narratives.)⁸ Even the life we think of as primary experience—that is, events like birth, copulation, death, plowing and planting, getting and spending—is rarely experienced without some sort of mediation in narrative; one of the chief arguments for an ethical criticism of narrative is that narratives make and remake what in realist views are considered more primary experiences—and thus make and remake ourselves. The transition from what we think of as more primary (because “real”) to the experience of stories about it is so automatic and frequent that we risk losing our sense of just how astonishing our story worlds are, in their power to add “life” upon “life”—for good or ill.

We all live a great proportion of our lives in a surrender to stories about our lives, and about other possible lives; we live more or less *in* stories, depending on how strongly we resist surrendering to what is

8. The most recent claim of this kind was made by the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography (1986, 383).