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For the literary critic literature is seen as a largely self-enclosed, self-sustaining enterprise. Works of literature must be approached primarily in terms of their own inner structure, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, delineation of character, dynamics of plot, and so on. Only occasionally is the external society allowed to intrude and then merely descriptively, as a necessary background. The modern literary critic, absorbed as he is in wholly textual criticism, in the intrinsic qualities of literature, would almost certainly be hostile to any claim that his subject could be illuminated by an approach which would be largely extrinsic. To suggest that sociology (defining it for the moment as one example of the extrinsic approach) would not merely cast light on certain literary problems, but that without it there could not be a complete understanding of literature – such a view would be rejected, and with feeling. After all, as the literary critic would doubtless point out, the study of literature and the study of society imply wholly different methods and orientations. What possible bridge can there be between the worlds of imagination and science?

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As with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it. Thus the novel, as the major literary genre of industrial society, can be seen as a faithful attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the State; it delineates too his roles within the family and other institutions, the conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. In the purely documentary sense, one can see the novel as dealing with much the same social, economic, and political textures as sociology. But of course it achieves more than this; as art, literature transcends mere description and objective scientific analysis, penetrating the surfaces of social life, showing the ways in which men and women experience

society as feeling. 'Without the full literary witness,' writes Richard Hoggart, 'the student of society will be blind to the fullness of a society.'\*

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response to this experience. Literature, because it delineates man's anxieties, hopes, and aspirations, is perhaps one of the most effective sociological barometers of the human response to social forces. It has to be said, however, that while literature will reflect social values and feelings in the way that Lowenthal has argued, it is highly probable that as society grows more complex in its modes of socialization, change, and social structure, it will become increasingly difficult to analyse literature solely in terms of reflection. In the eighteenth century it was still possible for Fielding in *Tom Jones* to portray a whole society, a totality, in terms of its values and feelings through his rich gallery of characters; as, indeed, had Homer living in a more homogeneous and smaller society. But with the beginnings of industrialization and the development of a complex social structure involving a multiplicity of class and status positions, together with the growth of mass communications and the so-called mass society, 'no one could possibly attempt anything along the same lines . . . if only because no single individual can have personal knowledge of more than a minute fraction of it'.\* If the novel, whose rise parallels the emergence of industrial society, reflects social structure, then it has done so in portraying the problems of *society in general* in terms of a restricted milieu which functions as a social microcosm: Balzac's nobles, bourgeoisie, and artists, Proust's decaying aristocracy, Aldous Huxley's upper-class intellectuals, reflect the particular historical crisis of society in general.

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century aristocracy. With the rise of cheap publishing and a mass market the patronage system gives way to the autocracy of the publisher and booksellers. The growth, too, of a specifically middle-class audience in the late eighteenth century helped to shift the writer's position from one of dependence to one of profession. This gradual democratization of culture, as the German sociologist Karl Mannheim has called it, is especially significant for the rise of the novel, a pre-eminently middle-class literary genre, and the emergence of modern 'sensibility' or modern psychology. The cultural triumph of the middle classes can be seen as foreshadowing mass culture and the virtual commercialization of literature. The writer's position in a mass society is extremely important as a contrast to his earlier social situation, and clearly likely to affect his creative potential in many ways; the links between this historical background and the development of literature constitute a key area in any literary sociology. It involves a major problem, namely the precise linkage between the text and its background – how do literary production and consumption affect the form and the content of particular literary works? It must be noted, however, that although this approach is essential for any thorough understanding of literature, as crucial support for textual analysis, great care has to be exercised in order to avoid the extremely crude forms of reductionism, so obviously inherent in it. The work of literature must never become a mere epiphenomenon of its surrounding environment.

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the artist on the altar of profit. It could be argued, then, that the 'true' meaning of great literature and the social groups involved in its production lies precisely in the quest and the struggle of both for 'authentic values', the values of a genuine human community in which human needs, aspirations, and desires are mediated through social interaction. If this is so, and it will be defended later in the book, then the task of the sociologist is not simply to discover historical and social reflection (or refraction) in works of literature, but to articulate the nature of the values embedded within particular literary works, what Raymond Williams has called 'the structure of feeling'.<sup>\*</sup> Thus Lowenthal has suggested that the main purpose of any viable sociology of literature must be to discover the 'core of meaning' which one finds at the heart of different works of literature and which expresses many aspects of thought and feeling on subjects as varied as social class, work, love, religion, nature, and art.

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analysis. It is interesting to note that on this point most sociologists of literature and literary critics are agreed: one studies great writers and their texts precisely because their greatness implies deep insights into the human and the social condition. Thus for Leo Lowenthal, the artist 'portrays what is more real than reality itself', while for Richard Hoggart, great literature penetrates more deeply into human experience because it has the capacity 'to see not only individual instances but deeper and more long-term movements below the surface detail' and the ability 'to unite dissimilars, to reveal a pattern out of a mass and a mess, like a magnet placed into iron filings'.\* The great artist portrays 'the whole man in depth'.†

The problem of choice cannot be resolved here but it clearly involves the question of criteria; and the specific criterion seems here to be simply that of persistence, that great literature *survives*. If this is so it brings into doubt the nature of any sociology of mass culture, popular culture, and so on, which, on this view, does not have a message for posterity or contain deep insights into man's social and human condition. But if the basic purpose of sociology is to understand the nature and the workings of all societies and men's position within them, then popular culture must surely claim a reasonable status. If the argument of Lowenthal is accepted, that literature embraces the fundamental values and symbols which provide cohesion to the different groups within society, then popular culture could be used as a 'diagnostic tool' for analysing modern man, especially since it has become so widely produced and assimilated.‡