4 FROM ACTION TO DISCOURSE

In this chapter we wish to look more positively at possible solutions to the three basic problems raised in Chapter 3, namely individualism and mechanism, which are pervasive features of social psychological research, and the overly simplistic view taken of the process of reading. In particular we will discuss work by Rom Harré and Paul Willis which faces up to the first two of these faults, and thereby forms a potentially more fruitful basis for constructive interchange between literature and social psychology. However, we will argue that the very sophistication of Harré and Willis's analyses starkly highlights, yet does not solve, the problem of reading. Both in their approach to everyday talk and to specifically literary texts, the issue of how to make sense of discursive material becomes so acute that it can no longer be avoided. We will argue that only a thorough reappraisal of the process of sense-making and reading can provide a firm foundation for a properly constructive analytic practice. Such a practice is clearly important for the study of literary texts; yet it has a significance beyond that. For it is a necessary prerequisite for a social psychology which pays serious attention to people's everyday discourse in its many different forms. In the process of discussing these issues it may seem at times that we are forgetting our purpose of relating social psychology to literature in preference for problems intrinsic to one discipline or the other. However, it should become clear that, while they are expressed in different ways, a number of issues significant in one discipline have important implications for the other.

First of all, however, let us examine in detail Harré and Willis's approaches to social life which stress the crucial significance of social resources and the social context in human action, while not consigning actors to the role of mere passive victims of their circumstances. Harré's 'ethogenic' theory of social behaviour will be examined as it has been applied to the study of football supporters, and it will be compared with Willis's work on the complex reasons which lead working-class boys to take manual working-class jobs.

ETHOGENICS AND RULES OF DISORDER

The basis of the ethogenic theory, overviewed in Harré's book Social Being, is a distinction between 'competence' and 'performance'. (1) This distinction was originally used by Chomsky to contrast the speaker's or hearer's knowledge of language with the actual use of language in concrete situations. (2) If we understand a speaker's knowledge of language we can also understand how certain utterances made by the speaker are possible, although understanding how they are possible does not explain the performance, how a particular sentence is produced. Thus it is, claims Harré, with social life. We can explain action, whether it be through talk or otherwise, by reference to the actor's 'social competence'. Put another way, the possession of a certain social competence is a necessary requirement for the correct performance of certain acts and at the same time sets limits on the acts it is possible to perform. Yet many more things than the social competence will be involved in the specific performance of those acts.

The central ethogenic hypothesis, then, is that people possess a store of social knowledge which enables them both to act and to give accounts (explications, justifications, etc.) of their actions. This hypothesis has important methodological consequences. As the same set of cognitive resources are seen to underlie both actions and the description and justification of those actions, then it should be possible to elucidate the nature of particular actions by using accounts of them given by the actors. The analysis of accounts will reveal features of people's social competences which, in turn, will reveal the significance of their acts.

Unfortunately, according to Harré, it is not possible to avoid this roundabout route to the explication of action. The actions of human beings within a culture are far more than mere movements, because they only take on meaning in the context of specific, and often very local, social conventions. Thus, to reiterate a well worn example: it may seem obvious to an observer that two people shaking each other's hand are greeting one another. But this obviousness is derived from a social competence shared between the handshakers and the observer. Each understands the appropriate social convention which allows them to see the movements of hand shaking as an act of greeting. There is nothing necessary or intrinsic to hand-shaking which means that it can only signify a greeting. An observer would certainly not have the same ease in identifying the greeting ceremony of a very different culture; say that of Maoris or football fans. Here the observer might confuse the act of greeting with an expression of intimacy or the passing of insults, or perhaps the movements would simply appear enigmatic and indecipherable. Actions thus have a semiological character. That is to say, their meaning is not derived from the brute movements themselves, but from a network of social conventions which allow certain movements to be seen as the performance of a particular act and distinguish that act from different but related acts.

The analogy with Chomsky goes even further than this basic distinction between competence and performance. Chomsky equates the idea of linguistic competence with the mastery of an underlying system of rules. Similarly, Harré suggests that an essential part of our social competence is knowledge of social rules. It is these social rules which to a large part enable people to act proficiently and rationally, and furthermore to display that proficiency and rationality. (3)

The social conventions mentioned above are seen as interpretative rules by Harré: they enable social actors to assign meaning to movements and events. However, there is also another important class of rules which is used not for the assignment of meaning but for the regulation of activity. These regulative or prescriptive rules enable people to choose correct or legitimate courses of action in particular situations. Harré's suggestion, then, is that people draw upon cognitive resources, a shared social competence, to produce effective and proper social activity and also enmesh that activity with that of other social actors. Interpretative rules enable people to define situations while regulative rules, in turn, enable them to produce actions legitimate within these situations. These actions, of course, may further change the nature of the situation, and so on. (4)

It will make the practical and methodological implications of these ideas clearer if we briefly describe a specific research example taken from Marsh, Rosser and Harré's analysis of the social worlds of football fans. (5) In part of their analysis Marsh, Rosser and Harré attempt to show that the apparently unrestrained aggressive behaviour of the fans is in fact tightly structured and rule bound, that is, these seemingly disorderly actions are guided by a shared social competence.

Using the fans' accounts and observations of their behaviour the authors suggest that in the various confrontations between opposing fans there operates a complex structure of rules which, except in very unusual circumstances, prevents fans being seriously injured. For instance, fights may be terminated by the loser ceasing hostile action and looking downwards and away from his opponent. This display of submission would, in most instances, stop the aggression before either party was seriously hurt. Furthermore, in many confrontations no actual physical conflict took place at all; both sides could satisfy the requirements that their honour be retained in a chase. Those fans who did the chasing would achieve a highly visible victory by seeing the opposition off; while those being chased would not lose any face from such a patently tactical retreat. Indeed, there may be very little desire to actually catch the fleeing fans. To do so might actually constitute a breakdown of the conventions which constrain serious violence, and therefore lead to fans getting hurt. Chasing thus becomes a more expressive than practical activity. It demonstrates the willingness to fight without the damaging consequences which would result from actually fighting.

In addition to exhibiting in their accounts this orderly view of life on the terraces the fans presented another, very different view. This suggested that a great deal of actual violence takes place, that many people get hurt, and that football matches are inherently dangerous places. Sometimes, as the following extract shows, these two sorts of account are closely intertwined.

Questioner.	What do you do when you put the boot in?
Fan A.	You kicks em in the head don't you? ... Strong boots with metal toe-caps on and that.
Questioner.	And what happens then?
	[Quizzical look]
Questioner.	Well what happens to the guy you've kicked?
Fan A.	He's dead.
Fan B.	Nah - he's all right - usually anyway. (6)

In this extract Fan A formulates a picture of violent and dangerous struggle, while Fan B interrupts with a much more placid picture. Marsh, Rosser and Harré want to suggest that the violent, disorderly version does not give an accurate representation of football supporting, and also that the fans themselves know that it is not really that dangerous. They claim that the fans, in part of their talk at least, have adopted the exaggerated account of violence constructed by the mass media. Moreover, they suggest that it is the combination of the two accounts, the one which stresses disorder and violence and the other which focuses on order and safety, which maintains the specific activities of the fans. For the accounts which emphasise violence and destruction keep up the fans' excitement when they become involved in the action, and also open up the possibility of constructing 'glorious' and exciting stories of the events afterwards. Yet, as they 'know' it is safe, they are able to take part in the activities without reservation. Thus, paradoxically, the fans' accounts of disorder can be seen to play an essential and purposeful part in the maintenance of their local social order. They form a functional rhetoric, which the authors contrast with the fans' more descriptive talk emphasising order.

For Marsh, Rosser and Harré, then, the fans' accounts have a crucial place in the analysis of their activities. Through these accounts the researchers are able to reveal the structure of rules which regulate and give meaning to the fans' actions. What is not clear, however, is how it is possible for Marsh, Rosser and Harré to identify one set of accounts as mainly descriptive, as elucidating the structuring of interaction, and another set as mainly rhetorical, used to excite and glorify the fans' lives. We will explore this issue in more detail shortly, but first let us examine Willis's work.

LEARNING TO LABOUR

In his book <u>Learning to Labour</u> Willis set out to address the issue of how manual working-class boys get working-class jobs. (7) How is it that, without obvious physical coercion, and despite poor

economic rewards, an undesirable social definition and the intrinsic meaninglessness of the work, working-class boys still let themselves take working-class jobs? Willis followed a group of adolescents through their last two years of school and first year of work to try and get at the specific processes taking place within the boys' local culture. The group were working-class boys from the 'oppositional subculture' of a secondary modern school in a large Midlands industrial town. Willis attended their classes and spent time with them, around the school and during the evenings, gathering individual accounts and recording group discussions.

Willis used this data to argue that the idea that manual working-class boys are the bottom end of a continuum of decreasing ability and confidence is false. Instead, he suggests that the working-class boys in the study exhibited a radically different cultural form with its own processes, definitions and accounts of other social groups. And it is the specific features of this culture - understood within the broader social/institutional context - which must be used to explain the choice of working-class jobs.

It is at a point between their second and fourth year at school that some of the pupils begin to take part in the school's oppositional culture. (8) In the process of joining this culture they adopt a new social perspective for understanding and evaluating the school: its authority is undermined and opposed, and they sharply differentiate themselves from those pupils who they see as accepting the school's official ethos. Those pupils who join 'the lads' (as they call themselves) thus take on a new and clearly defined set of social conventions, or rules, for understanding their situation and ordering their activities.

The lads continually express opposition to the authority of the school through their interactions with staff in and out of lessons. They undermine and invert the school values of diligence, deference and respect through endless minor displays of insubordination. Willis describes the lads in class.

> Settled in class, as near a group as they can manage, there is a continuous scraping of chairs, a bad tempered 'tut-tutting' at the simplest request, and a continuous fidgeting about which explores every permutation of sitting or lying on a chair. During private study, some openly show disdain by apparently trying to go to sleep with their head sideways down on the desk, some have their backs to the desk gazing out of the window, or even vacantly at the wall. There is an aimless air of insubordination ready with spurious justification and impossible to nail down. If someone is sitting on the radiator it is because his trousers are wet from the rain, if someone is drifting across the classroom he is going to get some paper for written work, or if someone is leaving class he is going to empty the rubbish 'like he usually does'. (9)

Those pupils who are seen by the lads as conformers they label 'ear'oles'. They oppose these conformers, partly because they feel

superior to them. This sense of superiority is maintained through a number of features specific to their oppositional culture. For instance, in their view the lads have a good time, 'a laff', while the ear'oles do not, for they have far too much invested in the traditional teaching model and its definitions of their world to spend time having fun.

The lads feel especially superior in matters of sex; they were the ones, they believed, who could successfully 'chat up birds' and were fully sexually experienced. This sexually attractive and potent image, along with further opposition to the school's authority, is reinforced by the consumption of cigarettes and alcohol and the adoption of current clothing fashions in place of the uniform. Willis argues that these things are significant not so much for their practical value or for the direct pleasure they bring, but because of what they express. Fashionable clothing certainly makes the lads more attractive to the opposite sex; yet, because of its contrast with school uniform, it also differentiates them from the ear'oles and symbolically questions the legitimacy of the school culture. With cigarettes, similarly, the important thing is to be seen to smoke; smoking is a highly visible way of expressing disdain for the strictly enforced rules on smoking, and it becomes a site for further conflict with authority. In these activities and styles, the lads thus draw creatively on certain cultural meaning systems from outside the school to express the distinction between their particular culture and the official culture of the school. (10)

Willis suggests that through participation in this oppositional culture within the school the lads develop an understanding, at least in practical terms, of the true role of the school and the career guidance that it offers. The members of this culture 'see through' the school's official rhetoric of educational opportunity and career choice. For instance, they are very sceptical about the value of qualifications. They see them as making little difference in the kinds of manual jobs they are likely to get. With this view, Willis argues, they have penetrated, at least partially, the common educational myth that opportunities can be made by education and the qualifications it provides, rather than the upwards pull of the economy.

The lads see qualifications as offering a maximum upward mobility which reaches only to apprenticeships and clerical work. But they view these jobs as encroaching on their lives in the way manual labour does not. Mental work is seen as bound up with obedience, childhood and the authority of the school; in contrast they see a number of direct continuities between the specifically oppositional culture of the school and the aggressive, adult culture of the shop floor. Moreover, because it is not the intrinsic features of manual labour that are important to the lads, but the particular culture it offers and what that culture represents, the idea of job choice is irrelevant. The significant categories of choice for the lads lie in the simple binary opposition of manual work and 'penpushing'; and they had firmly elected to take the former path.

Willis thus concludes that there is a period, perhaps only a moment, in the development of these adolescents' culture when the lads have a partial insight into the nature of their social situation and when their active choice of manual labour is both an expression of opposition and transcendence and at the same time their entry into a system of exploitation. In the adoption of these jobs they are displaying their rejection of the spurious ideology of educational opportunity, with its empty promise of mobility, yet at the same time consigning themselves to a lifetime's manual labour. The choice of these jobs, then, does not arise from some simple internalisation of a dominant ideology, or because the boys are too lacking in intelligence to know any different, but from the understandings, conventions and values that arise in their specific culture.

SOCIAL ACTION IN HARRE AND WILLIS'S WORK

In the last chapter we suggested that the constructive interpenetration of social psychological and literary approaches to social life has been restricted by three basic shortcomings in the research of social psychologists and traditional literary critics. Furthermore, we suggested that the elimination of these shortcomings could provide a sounder theoretical and analytical basis for addressing the social psychological implications of literature. We have discussed Harré and Willis's work in general terms above. Let us now overview the ways in which this work has dealt with the first two of these flaws before going on to address the remaining difficulties posed by the third.

In many respects Harré and Willis's work emphasises the social dimensions of interaction in very similar ways. For Harré, social knowledge is presupposed in the notion of 'social competence'. This consists in the categories and rules of a specific culture. As people are initiated into that culture - for instance novice football fans into the group of full-blown supporters - they are initiated into its specific set of categories and rules. In other words, they become socially competent members of the group. According to Harré, the very existence of a social order, be it of football rowdies or people making small talk at cocktail parties, presupposes a very high degree of consensus about the appropriate rules. Social organisation and interaction are not derived from biological necessity, or the information processing skills of asocial beings, but from culturally constructed social conventions.

Like Harré, Willis emphasises the importance of the local conventions and values which are shared by the group. It is not their individual insights which lead to partial understanding of their social circumstances, but the practical knowledge which arises out of their activity in the group. In fact Willis found a relative suspension of individual interests. The important social dynamics could only be understood by treating the group as having a specific identity. No amount of aggregation of individual characteristics would make the group activity and insight intelligible.

This emphasis on the social dimensions of activity has important methodological implications. It means that it cannot be taken for granted that the crucial features of the groups' attitudes and behaviour can be pieced together out of interviews conducted individually with its members. And although both Willis and Marsh carried out individual interviews, many of their most interesting and informative findings are derived from exchanges which took place within the group.

The approaches set out in Social Being and Learning to Labour both place a great deal of emphasis on the role of participants' activity and understandings. Rather than taking these things to be irritating noise, whose effects must be minimised in a 'proper' psychological explanation, Harré and Willis view participants as continually and creatively initiating action in the light of their practical goals and understanding of their specific context. Thus Marsh, Rosser and Harré did not view the football fans in their study as caused to act in certain ways by features of their environment; instead he took them to be using the various cognitive resources which make up their social competence to guide their actions and enmesh them with others'. There is, then, no causal relation between the rules and the actions they guide. Indeed, deviations and breakdown of rules are a persistent danger on the football terraces, often resulting in uncharacteristically serious injuries. Similarly, in Willis's study, the lads' choice of unskilled, manual jobs is explained as an active and creative - although ultimately ruinous - response to their penetration of the official accounts of schooling and career choice. These approaches contrast strongly with a great deal of traditional social psychology and sociology, where action is customarily seen as under the direct, causal influence of the environment or to be blindly governed by institutional or ideological forces. (11)

Both Harré and Willis, then, adopt a qualitative approach which emphasises the crucial importance of people's accounts for the proper explanation of their activities. In fact they argue that no satisfactory explanation will be possible without access to the categories which the participants use to characterise and make sense of their own social worlds. It is clear that this approach, which uses participants' discourse as its basic data, deals more adequately with social and intentional aspects of behaviour and ought to be able to address specifically literary issues in a way denied to more traditional perspectives in social psychology. And indeed Harré has used this approach to draw on literary examples in a way which we will discuss shortly. Yet, in analysing discourse, whether in the form of participants' accounts or literary texts, there is, as we have seen, a third problem to be faced. It is to this we now turn.

READING AND REALISM

One of the points that Harré has repeatedly emphasised is the wide variety of purposes to which accounts can be put. (12) For in-

stance, a person's account of a particular act - buying a car, say, or killing someone - may be meant to explicate those actions, to explain why they did it. However, it is also possible that the account is intended to warrant or justify the act, to show that it is right and proper. Furthermore, the account may be directed towards practical ends; perhaps it is used to achieve a particular goal, such as obtaining money or a better job. On the other hand, it may have the more expressive purpose of simply displaying the speaker as skilful or innocent, or perhaps worthy in some other way. Clearly, these are all viable conceptual distinctions; we have no problem in seeing them as different. But can they be reliably made in practice?

Much of Harré's work has been concerned merely to stress the significance of these distinctions. However, in the research on football rowdies with Marsh and Rosser he has attempted to apply them to actual data. We saw in the earlier discussion of this work that the fans' activities on the terraces were seen to be maintained by the operation of two distinct kinds of accounts: one which depicts events as 'orderly and rule bound' and another which characterises them as 'disorderly and dangerous'. The former characterises the terraces as in fact safe, while the latter, in contrast, increases the excitement and creates many expressive possibilities for the fans who are ever keen to demonstrate their valour. Now, Marsh, Rosser and Harré claim that they are not trying to determine the truth of these accounts. For there is no one true, literal account of an event; any event may be accounted for in many ways. Nevertheless, they treat the accounts which depict order as if they explicate the genuine structure of the fans' interactions, even though they do not see them as directly veridical. This portion of the fans' discourse is taken to reveal a social reality beyond itself. '[The] apparently disordered events on the football terraces [...] can be seen as conforming to a very distinct and orderly system of roles, rules and shared meanings. Action is neither chaotic nor senseless but rather is structured and reasoned.' (13)

In contrast, the alternative set of accounts, which emphasise senseless violence, is treated as rhetorical, i.e. these accounts are treated as more important for what they 'do' than for what they 'say'. The authors suggest that they are 'conspiratorial' accounts, derived largely from press reports, which the fans use to retain an exciting sense of danger and as a resource for valorous display. In the following extract what the fans really 'know' about what goes on is contrasted with their rhetorical 'construction' of events.

> Since fans 'know' that this is not the case - they are aware and can tell you that few people get hurt even when things 'get out of hand' - they must conspire to construct disorder. And because there is an easy rhetoric to hand - the rhetoric of the media which insists that events at football matches are *in fact* disordered, the conspiracy is an easy one to conduct. (14)

For Marsh, Rosser and Harré, therefore, certain sections of the fans' talk are treated as literal, or at least intimately bound up

with the realities of life on the terraces, while other sections of talk are treated as rhetorical.

Willis, similarly, comments on the contradictory and fragmented nature of the accounts he analyses in his study. However, as is clear from the way he uses accounts to document his conclusions, he too separates out accounts into those which have a 'true cultural resonance' from those which are simply given as attempts to please the investigator or out of politeness. Just as with the football study, accounts which are supposedly literal are sifted from those which are seen as rhetorical or false. And Willis's explanations depend on his ability to make judgments of this sort.

This raises, in an acute form, the problem of reading. How is it that these analysts can apparently select, from what they themselves point out is a contradictory and variable corpus, certain accounts which reveal the actual nature of the actions, attitudes, social groupings, etc. under study? How is it, in other words, that these analysts are seemingly able to read one set of accounts realistically, as genuine social indicators, in contrast to another set of accounts which are rhetorical or ironic?

One reply might be that the analyst can do this through observation of the participants, which would serve as a check on the literal accounts and show the others to be rhetorical. However, if it were observation that enabled the analyst to do this there would be no need for the complicated and time-consuming process of account gathering. The analyst would be able to observe and then record the observations as 'what really went on'. Yet, as we noted earlier, Harré himself stresses that accounts must be used to give meaning to observations, that observations on their own are insufficient. And Willis also emphasises the crucial role of participants' accounts. Furthermore, at no point in their respective studies do Marsh, Rosser and Harré or Willis attempt to show how observations might be used as a reliable basis from which to evaluate the facticity of accounts.

In fact the issue of how accounts can be divided into the genuine, realistic and the rhetorical, ironic or merely polite is never explicitly raised in these works. Categorisations of this kind are taken as unproblematic. Yet we wish to suggest that the analysis of accounts must be given a much more systematic basis than this. Analysis should pay much closer attention to the specifically discursive properties of verbal data. However, before we go on to tease out some of the detailed analytic implications of this position, let us examine Harré's approach to specifically literary discourse.

HARRE, TOLSTOY AND SHAKESPEARE

As we might expect from our argument up to now, Harré draws on literature to a much greater extent than is common in social psychology. And he also draws on it in relation to central social

psychological issues rather than as a separate and somewhat esoteric topic on its own. Nevertheless, in some respects his approach to literary texts is more traditional than his approach to everyday accounts.

As part of a broader discussion of certain issues in social psychology, Harré has examined Tolstoy's War and Peace and Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost, each in similar ways. (15) Drawing upon Tolstoy's appendix, which gives a detailed characterisation of the book's social implications, Harré takes War and Peace to embody a theory of the social properties of collectivities (which he goes on to criticise). This theory suggests that the only genuine properties of large scale social groups are simple, gross features such as migrations from country to country. In contrast, smaller scale groups have no genuine, intrinsic properties at all. Indeed, this disorderliness leads people to look to historians and such like to provide them with representations of the events which are orderly, although ultimately fictitious. For example, Tolstoy's description of the Battle of Borodino is treated as showing the typical formlessness of small scale collectivities. It is depicted as an accidental and thoroughly chaotic event, which was a victory for neither army. Yet the historians on each side characterised the battle as orderly and, moreover, as skilfully directed by the army armies' leaders, Kutusov and Napoleon.

In the case of Love's Labour's Lost, Harré identifies a number of social psychological theories which are features of the play's plot. In particular, he stresses the importance to the play of a theme concerning the relationship between people's reason and their emotions. He warrants this interpretation of the play by reference to a historical investigation by Frances Yates. (16) This suggested that the play is a commentary on contemporary discussions of the connections between the intellect and the passions, and most especially on an essay about this topic by the Earl of Northumberland. Harré suggests that Shakespeare provides a detailed explanation of this theory in Love's Labour's Lost, and shows that 'the possibility of actually achieving a real domination of the passions is a fantasy'. (17)

Two traditional assumptions are embedded in Harré's approach to literary texts. Firstly, he takes as especially privileged certain authors' interpretations of their own work: in the case of Tolstoy his interpretation of War and Peace outlined in the appendix; in the case of Shakespeare his interpretation as revealed in Yates's historical research. Secondly, Harré treats these texts as having a single, coherent meaning which expresses certain social psychological theories. In fact, he treats literary texts as unified in a way which he does not assume for the football rowdies' accounts. Harré was happy to emphasise the heterogeneity and contradictions in their representations of life on the terraces. Yet he seems reluctant to extend the same licence to literary texts. As we will see, both these assumptions impede a fruitful analytic practice both in studies of literature and other kinds of discourse.

Harré's justification of literature's significance for social psychology stresses its role in 'reflecting' social life.

> Literary works ... reflect, to some degree, the actual psychological processes, personality types, rhetorics etc. available to the folk of their time. I presume that in a play, the psychology of the characters which did not reflect that of the audience in a considerable measure would be unacceptable. (18)

This warrant is interesting because it lies uneasily at the intersection of two rather different perspectives on literature. One of these falls squarely into the expressive realist model discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. It takes the importance of literature to lie in its true and acute depiction of reality. As an argument for the use of literature as a resource for social psychology it has severe limitations. For, in equating acceptability to readers with psychological reality, it seems to imply that all popular literature will be realistic in some way or other. Yet this type of claim does not advance analysis very far, because it ultimately throws up the very same problem that this criterion was meant to solve, namely that of deciding what aspects of a text are realistic or not.

Take, for instance, a study by Middleton which finds a strong correlation between family-size in the USA and in the popular literature of that country during three separate periods. (19) The implication of this research is that literature can embody accurate social knowledge. However, this correlation is only a contingent fact. There is no theory of literature which suggests that correlations of this kind must continue, and therefore that literature might be used as a reliable indicator of family-size in other eras and other countries. Moreover, such a perspective condemns literature to the status of a highly imperfect form of social assessment.

There is, however, a more interesting way of reading Harré's warrant of the significance of literature. If it is stripped of its expressive realist language, which formulates literary texts as reflections of reality, the warrant can be seen from a different perspective. This stresses that texts, like people, are not islands divorced from their social contexts but are crucially dependent on systematic forms of sense-making and codes of interpretation.

As Barthes has most effectively shown in the analysis of a 'realist' text by Balzac in _S/Z_, texts do not derive their significance from being 'copies of the world' but are dependent for their intelligibility upon other signifying systems or codes of presuppositions. (20) To take one of the simpler examples from _S/Z_: the sentence 'Midnight had just sounded from the clock of the Elysée-Bourbon' appears early in Balzac's text. Barthes suggests that its significance derives not from what it denotes but from what it connotes. Readers with the appropriate background knowledge will know that the Elysée-Bourbon is in a wealthy neighbourhood of Paris noted for its popularity among the nouveaux riches who became wealthy through speculation and similar means. (21) The literal, denotative meaning of this sentence comes to be of secondary importance, and indeed could be replaced by many different sentences. What is crucial is what the sentence - or any possible replacement - conveys through its connotations, namely the information about wealth which is structurally needed for making sense of Balzac's text.

From this second perspective, which we wish to develop in this book, the justification for examining literature does not lie in its acute reflection of reality but in its embodiment of conventional forms of sense-making. If we are to analyse these forms, and start to compare them to forms of sense-making used in social psychology, we will need to develop an analysis of discourse.

ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE

In order to address the problems raised by our examination of Harré and Willis's work let us now look in more detail at the recent developments in literary criticism referred to in Chapter 3 and their implications for the analysis of both literary and non-literary discourse.

Literary critics have traditionally considered a number of tasks to be appropriate to their role: explication of the biography of the author and possibly his or her social and intellectual context, delimiting the different literary allusions in the work and so on. More recently, partly because of what Culler has described as the hegemony of the New Criticism, the central task of literary studies has been seen to be the production of interpretations of individual texts. (22) What was held as important was the unitary meaning of a particular text, which could be revealed through the reader's experience. Nevertheless, its meaning was seen to be a property of the text itself, rather than to reside in the experience of the reader.

More recently there has been a significant shift away from these traditional approaches. This shift has centred on the role of interpretation and the way meaning is assigned to texts. It is proposed that instead of looking at the sense of the text as a given, pre-existent entity, emphasis is placed on the way sense is 'made' of the text. With this shift the central analytic question ceases to be 'what is the meaning of the text?', or 'what is its correct interpretation?'. Instead it now becomes: 'how is the meaning of the text produced?'. Or, put another way, 'What is the process by which readers assign specific meanings to particular texts?'. As a consequence, the proliferation of interpretations characteristic of traditional criticism is no longer taken to be the end-point of analysis; instead it becomes the 'topic' for analysis. The goal of such a transformed perspective on literature, then, is to explicate the varied 'reading practices' of authors, critics and 'ordinary' readers and to elucidate the semiological processes through which texts acquire meaning. (23)

Let us clarify the distinctiveness of this perspective by making some of its implications more explicit. One direct consequence of this shift is that literary texts are not to be considered to have a particular, enduring meaning. In fact, meaning is not considered to lie 'within' the text, but to be a product of specific context-dependent readings. In this way the aim of analysis is not to strive after some hypothetical 'real meaning' of the text, but the

more modest, yet analytically more viable, aim of examining the way specific versions of the text's meaning are constructed for particular purposes. The meaning of the text is thus seen as continually 'achieved' via reading practices, which may be highly disparate, depending on their goals and context. (24)

Furthermore, the text is not to be considered as necessarily coherent and unitary. For coherence and unity are not somehow immanently present 'within' the text, but are resources for certain conventional styles of reading and at the same time the apparent outcome of those same readings. Thus in traditional criticism it is typically assumed that seemingly contradictory features of the text are 'meant to express a deliberate tension' or are 'not *really* contradictory at all': and as a consequence an interpretation becomes a document attesting to the unity of the text. Yet this is unsatisfactory from our present perspective since, clearly, interpretative resources, and the devices that go with them, need to become a topic for study in their own right. (25)

In the same way, the intention of the author cannot, as formerly, be taken as an unproblematic resource for legitimating particular interpretations of texts. For not only is the 'real' intention of the author as elusive as the 'real' meaning of the text, but in addition there is no reason to suppose that the author's intended meaning is necessarily more correct than the meaning given by readers or critics. Consequently, analytic interest has refocused on the way particular 'characterisations' of an author's intentions may be drawn on by different readers in the construction of interpretations of the author's work. Barthes expresses this well.

> It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged [...] He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work. (26)

The topic for study thus ceases to be the intentions themselves (even if they could somehow be isolated) but the way in which particular versions of 'the author's intentions' are constructed and drawn upon to make sense of the text.

As Jonathan Culler has been one of the most successful Anglo-Saxon commentators on these developments, and has done much himself to articulate a coherent semiological approach to literature, it is important to distinguish his perspective from the one we are proposing. This will also serve to further clarify our position.

Culler has tended to view the proper semiological approach as a search for people's (generally critics') social competence, where 'competence' is used in a sense similar to Harré's above. (27) This would lead the analyst to search for psychologically encoded sets of norms or rules which would enable people to assign certain meaning to particular texts. There are, however, two obvious difficulties

with this. Firstly, by calling for an analysis of sets of norms, Culler appears to take as unproblematic the relationship between norms and the particular interpretations they feature in. Norms are treated as having fixed meanings and acting as an inflexible constraint on interpretation. Yet this ignores the way in which norms making up a person's literary competence may be flexibly interpreted to fit particular circumstances. (28) Instead of looking at norms as an abstract system and presupposing their constraining role we suggest that attention should be paid to the particular practices in which norms are used. To have reading practices instead of norms as the focus of the analysis is far better, because it stresses the equal importance of the conventions which are available and how they are used in practical contexts.

The second difficulty is the sharp distinction between literature and other modes of discourse implied by the notion of a specific literary competence. Culler talks of literary conventions as quite distinct from broader social conventions. (29) Yet this reifies the category of 'literature' and prejudges the possibility of separating literary understanding from everyday understanding. There is nothing self-evident about this separation. Indeed, many of Culler's sources, in particular Barthes, have claimed the existence of an unavoidable and thoroughgoing interpenetration of literary and everyday form of understanding. (30)

In this present work our aim is not to sharpen the distinction between literary and other forms of understanding, nor to overemphasise the division between literary and other kinds of discourse. On the contrary, we wish to suggest that problems of literary interpretation should be seen as part of a more general issue of the interpretation of all sorts of discursive material. Or, to put it another way, 'reading' practices should be seen as a subset of more general interpretative practices. Accordingly, any specific features of literary understanding should be allowed to emerge through analysis rather than be stipulated beforehand. What is required, then, is a broad analysis of discourse, whether that discourse is spoken, written or literary.

Let us now return to our discussion of Harré and Willis's analysis of accounts. We suggested that the way that they have read their accounts is a central, yet unexamined, issue. If we look at this in the light of the general analysis of discourse which we have proposed above, we can view Harré and Willis's readings as a 'topic' for analysis; i.e. we can elucidate their interpretative practices by a close examination of the way certain participants' accounts are read as literal and others' as rhetorical or ironic. In other words, we can treat their categories and ways of organising accounts as interpretative practices which are an essential, but unexamined, basis for their conclusions. (31)

More importantly, we can extend this to look at the interpretative practices of the participants themselves by examining the organisation and context dependence of their discourse. For instance, it would be possible to look at the various circumstances in which the

fans used the different accounts of their activities. Certain questions would be pertinent to this. Are 'violent and disorderly' accounts always used in the same interpretative context? What marks a particular speaker's shift from one sort of account to another? Do the fans themselves distinguish two sorts of account? Through asking questions such as these we can start to address the issue of what the fans' accounts are being used for, i.e. we can elucidate what the fans are doing in this sort of talk. Marsh, Rosser and Harré, of course, do speculate on the function of certain of the fans' accounts; yet they do not try to reveal this function through analysis. Instead they introduce the notion of a functional rhetoric to resolve the analytic problem raised by the variable and contradictory nature of the fans' accounts. For it is only by treating certain accounts as rhetorical, and sifting from them other, more literal accounts, that Marsh, Rosser and Harré are able to produce an orderly analytic version of the 'activities' of the fans. This analytic problem can be avoided, we suggest, by paying detailed attention to the interpretative practices of the fans as revealed in their discourse. (32) Some analyses which try to deal with participants' discourse in this way will be discussed in the next chapter.

Broadly speaking, then, there is a parallel between developments in literary criticism and in social analysis which can be summarised as follows. The central aim of literary criticism has been the production of the definitive, or at least the best, interpretation of a particular text. Likewise Harré and Willis, although in many respects more sophisticated than traditional social psychological approaches, still attempt to produce a definitive portrait of participants' attitudes and behaviours. The difference is that while traditional social psychologists try to do this via experiments and questionnaires Harré and Willis use participants' accounts. The new perspective suggests instead that analysis concentrated on explicating the varied interpretative practices by which versions (of a text's meaning, of some football supporters' actions) are constructed out of certain bodies of discourse (literary texts, participants' accounts).

It should now be apparent that this new approach is not vulnerable to those criticisms which suggest that social psychologists will have to abandon their critical, scientific objectivity if they are going to study literature. These criticisms relate wholly to those perspectives in psychology which adopt wholesale the expressive realist view which treats literature as a repository of true and valid insights into social life. However, our interest in literature does not derive from the possibility that great authors may have acute insights into our social existence. As we have seen, in literary criticism there has been a sustained critique of the idea that literary texts should be seen as the personal expression of certain highly gifted and creative individuals. For this 'commonsensical' notion simply impedes analysis by treating the production of texts as if it lies in an unanalysable realm of 'human creativity'. Our approach, therefore, is not 'subjective' in the sense of trying to deify novelists' perspectives on social life. It is exactly these perspectives which, we argue, should become the 'topic' for analysis and explanation.

A further important implication of our present approach is that it is not strictly accurate to say it is reading which is the subject of analysis. The analyst is faced with one or more stretches of discourse. Conventionally we might say that one passage of discourse is a 'reading' of another; yet this should not be taken to imply that this discourse in some way encapsulates an elusive 'inner' experience of reading. For our concern is with shared processes of sense-making and not primarily with any conventional differences which might exist between, for instance, an everyday account of a novel, a critic's interpretation, and the text of the novel itself. For analytic purposes, then, the question of reading becomes one of 'intertextuality', of the similarities and differences between texts and the way that one text draws upon others. (33) It is through documenting these similarities and differences, and carefully explicating their relationship to different discursive contexts, that we can start to elucidate the varied interpretative practices underlying the production of discourse. This is not to suggest, of course, that there are not interesting differences between a stretch of discourse in a novel, which may have been reworked many times, and the ad hoc utterances about the novel made by a first time reader. But these differences are not central to analysis. The task of the analyst should not be to emphasise the polish on one of these forms of discourse, but to expose the varied ways in which each constructs and naturalises versions of social reality.

LITERATURE AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Having addressed these issues concerning reading and interpretation it is now possible to draw the threads of these last two chapters together and elaborate on the central aims of this book. Both literature and social psychology can be considered as a body of texts (albeit with different goals, conventions, etc.) which contain accounts of actions, identities, and a myriad of other features of people's social lives. In each of the analytic chapters (1,2,7,8) comparisons are made between various kinds of literary and social psychological discourse. These chapters examine the way social life is made sense of and, moreover, depicted as real and natural in these two realms of discourse. We therefore treat 'realism' as an effect of the language used in these texts, rather than their grounds or cause. This involves examining the many devices, assumptions and accounting systems which are used to achieve the effect of literal description of the social world. It might seem that this is a futile task with scientific texts, which after all are usually taken to be the ultimate form of descriptive literature. Yet it would be wrong to think of them as exempt from such processes. As we shall see in Chapter 5, there is a growing body of work concerned exactly with the complex forms of 'reality construction' in various kinds of 'factual' discourse.

It should not be thought that our intention is solely to apply the insights derived from modern literary criticism to social psychology. At the same time as emphasising the important role of these

theoretical developments in elucidating certain central issues in social psychology, we wish to stress the significance of theoretical and empirical developments in social psychology for the study of literature. For too long literature has been treated either as if it exists in a purely sealed ascetic environment or as if it is a direct product of large scale social structures. Although recent literary criticism has rectified this to some extent by moving towards a systematic analysis of sense-making in literature, it has paid very little attention to the growing body of relevant research in social psychology and interpretative sociology. Theoretical work on social action (discussed in this chapter and the previous one) as well as empirical developments in discourse and conversational analysis (discussed in the next chapter) have raised issues which lie at the very heart of modern literary criticism. (34) A serious analysis of discourse can only benefit from a mutual interchange between disciplines that has been absent until now.

This attempt to elucidate the mutual implications of literature and social psychology can be seen in Chapters 1 and 2. There the juxtaposition of very different forms of discourse, which share certain common topics, allows the analyst to expose the contingency of certain taken-for-granted interpretative practices in both literature and social psychology, and thereby to document the way particular features of social life are depicted as obvious and natural.

In Chapter 1 a comparison is made between notions of femininity used in social psychology, literary criticism, and in the literature of Barbara Cartland, Jilly Cooper and Doris Lessing. In both the social psychological and the literary critics' work there is a tendency to treat femininity as a preconstituted entity which is merely described, in different ways, in social psychological and literary discourse. In many respects Barbara Cartland and Jilly Cooper, of course, are even more guilty in this respect. Yet Lessing's work can be read, on one level, rather differently. For it seems to take the Cartland/Cooper model of femininity and undermine it, substituting a more diverse and complex language of feminine subjectivity, although one which still reifies certain sexual categories.

In Chapter 2, on the other hand, the use of implicit models of Man is compared in three different kinds of discourse. In the case of social psychology we can see that such models are statically used to organise entire categories of discourse; while in Thomas Hardy's _Mayor of Casterbridge_, and in an 'everyday' account of someone's walk through their housing estate, such models can be used discretely, as with the social psychological discourse; but they can also be fluidly enmeshed to suit particular contexts and create certain effects.

In this chapter we have discussed some of the complex issues raised by studies which are based on participants' discourse in one form or another and we have argued that a proper response to these issues is a thoroughgoing analysis of discourse which is not constrained by traditional and unquestioned assumptions concerning the role of

texts in social life. In the next chapter we will discuss in more detail the complex interpenetration of participants' and social psychologists' ways of making sense of social life in the context of analyses of certain 'factual' texts.