Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Chapter 3

Novel narratives of modern times

[pp. 45-63]

> Music, art and science. Now all of these things are essentially European.
>
> (Margaret Thatcher, 1989)

There is an intimate and intriguing relationship between psychology and literature, for both disciplines provide pictures of action and experience and both claim to represent the truths of mental life. In different ways, reality claims are made by these scientific and artistic wings of Western culture, but attempts to make connections between the two have been made difficult by the stubbornly held assumptions of practitioners on the two sides: 'the causal, individualistic model of influence underlying traditional social psychology and the "truth and insight" model of writing which underlies traditional literary criticism' (Potter *et al.,* 1984: *51).* However, it is possible to deconstruct the difference between psychology and literature once we move away from the obsessions with truth that govern the two areas. This process can also help us understand the dynamics of culture, tensions reproduced and transformed in discourse.

In literature, the development of post-structuralist theory has provided a powerful challenge to traditional views of writing. The literary text, or any text for that matter, was no longer seen as the product of creative genius (Eagleton, 1983). Barthes argued that 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (1977: 146). This opened the way for a treatment of even the most precious poetic expressions of the human spirit as discourse (Easthope, 1983). Post-structuralism has taken fast in a variety of academic disciplines ranging from English literature to psychology; with this theoretical approach it was possible to collapse art into popular culture, philosophy into literature and science into [46] discourse. Any type of writing could be studied as a 'literary' form (Easthope, 1988).

In psychology, the turn to language through the new-paradigm challenge to laboratory-experimentation (Harré and Secord, 1972) has often involved a discussion of literary texts. Unlike the traditional psychologies which looked to literature as a repository of examples or confirmations of the truths discovered through proper empirical research (e.g., Ridgway and Benjamin, 1987), the approaches coming in the wake of; *and* templates for, the crisis in social psychology have looked to texts as exemplars of experience (e.g., Harré, 1983). The turn to discourse has further drawn attention to the constructive nature of literary language: 'Texts cannot be taken as straightforward descriptions of events, and events cannot be detached and analysed separately from the text' (Wetherell *et al,* 1983: 377).

The relationship between literature and psychology has been articulated in readings of literary texts and psychological accounts in a way which challenges the notion that

studies within the two disciplines have to be seen as mutually exclusive categories of work. There have been discussions, for example, of the relationship in such a way as: to give a description of the way gender is constructed as a category of experience within linguistic repertoires (Wetherell, 1986); to show how the self is displayed in the thriller genre (Back, 1989); and to illustrate the positioning of adult and child readers in relation to the discourse of radical fairy tales (Davies and Harré, 1990).

Deconstruction, part of the methodological armoury of post-structuralism, has also been used to treat social psychology as consisting of a series of detective, autobiographical and science fiction narratives (Squire, 1990a). It may be true that 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (Barthes, 1977:142). If so, psychology's attempt to locate problems inside individuals' heads is deeply problematic. This is not to say that the interrelationship between avant-garde literary theory and psychology has been without problems (Parker, 1989a), but the connection has opened up fruitful contradictions within the different areas.

There are two other points around which these ideas are expressed and which direct our attention to a crucial connection between literature and psychology. The first is to be found in contemporary philosophy, in the influential argument that instead of believing that our accounts, including scientific accounts, are 'mirrors of nature', we [47] should understand all knowledge as discursive, provisional, relative (Rorty, 1980). The second arises in cultural studies, in the argument that there is no such thing as society, there are only little stories told about it (Lyotard, 1984). These assertions, that we should now abandon the fetish for truth and recognise the essentially fictional nature of human existence, have implications for how we view the past and present. I will be dealing in this chapter with the development of *modern* notions of truth and their expression in literature. I take up the turn to little stories in postmodern visions of the social in the following chapter.

There may be no mirrors of nature in philosophy, science, psychology or literature, but there is a crucial sense in which the pictures in the texts which comprise these disciplines reflect one another within the dominant culture. The argument has been well made that '[t]he picture we gain from a text is not determined so much by some underlying experience of the author but by the arrangement and structure of the words in the text and their place in general cultural systems of meaning' (Potter *et al.,* 1984: 23). We move, with this argument, from a referential model (which always presumes some corresponding object outside the text in a one-to-one way) to a relational one (which looks at the way new meanings and 'objects' are formed in the text). As well as being relational, modern cultural systems of meaning can be understood as overarching knowledge structures meshed through with power (Parker, 1989b). Because these pictures and forms of knowledge are part of the symbolic architecture of the West, it is also useful to trace the way different 'ideas' have developed in particular texts in order to understand contemporary links between discourse and power.

In this chapter I will trace accounts of key psychological *phenomena* circulated in the discourses and texts of culture, and my references will be to some patches of literature, cultural analysis and political writing which inhabit Western culture. I aim to show that modern conceptions of the world have a history, that the discourses that relay those conceptions are contradictory, and that the dynamics which power and transform the contradictions are a necessary and progressive part of the

modern enlightenment project. In the first section I will explore some of the pictures of this modern age. Then, in the second section, I will describe the discourses in one novel produced early on in this historical period. As well being a site for the operation of discourse, the novel is a site of critique, and in the third [48] section of the chapter I will briefly draw attention to the ways in which modern discourses have developed and transformed themselves, the sense in which they are dynamic and contradictory. I will conclude with a description of the way connections between literature and psychology are being made in practice with processes of cultural and personal transformation.

MODERNITY

The historical period which frames the experience of the West now is that of modernity, sometimes termed 'the enlightenment' (e.g., Billig '4' *et al.,* 1988). I shall use the terms 'modernity' and 'enlightenment' interchangeably here. According to Foucault (1970) the birth of modernity had involved a conceptual inversion of classical thought in three fields: in overall views of the world (philosophy); in theories about the source of knowledge (epistemology); and in notions of the self (ontology). The conceptual machinery of universal truth, science, and an emphasis on the immutable structure of the natural world as the source of self-understanding were displaced from centre stage. These dominant discourses belonged, it is said, to the previous 'classical age' (Foucault, 1970). As a consequence, the new modern ideas of 'relativism', 'common sense' and 'personal knowledge' appeared. These ideas percolated into academic disciplines at different rates, finding their way late into new-paradigm psychology at the beginning of the 1970s (Parker, 1989a). But, both literature and psychology as disciplines, as well as the common sense outside that informs them, carry with them the effects of the old as well as new ages: the new open liberal humanist ideas which make modernity so attractive contain within them reminders of the old classical world-views.

When we attempt to highlight the key features of the culture of modernity, the representations of the world and ourselves as organised through discourses of humanised science, progress and individual meaning, we find traces of past periods woven into them. It is here that 'tradition' is located. In the case of 'royalty', for example, as representation of all that is right about tradition, family and property, a sense of continuity is maintained by discourses around cultural icons, and they inform what we call 'attitudes' mistakenly located in individual heads (Billig, 1988a). It is those discourses that make *collective* memory and ideology possible (Billig, [49] 1990b). Little surprise, perhaps, that the largest fascist group in Russia now is called 'Memory' *(Pamyat).* There is, incidentally, a semi-fascist fundamentalist Christian group in Latin America called 'Tradition, Family and Property' (Löwy, 1988). The dynamics of collective thought contain tensions in which we continually risk a regression of history as well as paths to progress. There is, as psychoanalytically informed cultural analysts of fascism in the Frankfurt School tradition said, a dialectic to the enlightenment (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972).

It would be possible to develop Foucault's (1977, 1981) later accounts of modern networks of power, discipline and confession so that all discourse emerging in modernity appeared to be oppressive (e.g., Parker, 1989b). We should, however, be cautious here. Berman has argued that 'there is no freedom in Foucault's world, because his language forms a seamless web, a cage far more airtight than anything Weber ever dreamed of;

into which no life can break. The mystery is why so many of today's intellectuals seem to want to choke in there with him' (1983: 35). Foucault is caricatured here, but the point is a good one, for many Foucauldians have come to the mistaken conclusion that there is no room any more, nor was there ever, for liberation. Berman's argument is part of a wider-ranging alternative discussion of modern culture, to which I will return below.

Culture is contradictory. We are often forced to acknowledge the presence of conflicting discourses in its texts, and it is this presence of contradiction which allows room for resistance, the refusal to respond within dominant meanings. We can see this contradiction in the texts which appeared in the English language at the turn of the eighteenth century, at the beginning of modernity. Within discourse analysis, the collection of studies in *Ideological Dilemmas* has been useful in tackling this question head-on. First of all, the authors have focused on the 'historical dimension' of their topics, such as gender, health and prejudice, and 'sought to draw attention to the continuing ideological history of liberalism, and of the Enlightenment' (Billig *et al.,* 1988: 145). They provide a general characterisation of Western enlightenment thought as revolving round liberal individualism.

Second, they have insisted that 'ideology does not imprint single images but produces dilemmatic quandaries' (Billig *et al.,* 1988: 146). These quandaries contain possibilities for resistance, as well as the very conditions for 'thought', here seen as a social, argumentative [50] process (Billig, 1987). While collective memory is the source of reactionary ideologies, it is also the accumulation of experience of progressive ideas (Middleton and Edwards, 1990). In the case of prejudice, for example, Billig *et al.* point out that it 'is to be dispelled when the underlying conditions, on which prejudice depends, are changed and the terms of present discussion are altered' (1988: 148). However, this does not mean the obliteration of the contested nature of conversation, of discourse. It is necessary, according to them, to provoke and support contradiction as an *end* as well as means, as an *enlightened* enlightenment.

MODERN NARRATIVES

The novel form represents one attempt, springing to life at the beginning of modernity, to enlighten a readership through processes of reflective narrative. Within that form, the conflicting discourses vying for supremacy in the new culture are well represented in satire. Modern satire stretches out versions of the social order, caricatures for moral effect, and represents a 'real' nature that is purported to lie within its victims. It presupposes a 'real' against which the reader might understand the images in the text. It represents positions in discourse in such a way that dilemmas, quandaries must be struggled the literary and popular armoury of the modern age. Early examples of this genre are found in novels appearing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One such satirical novel is Thomas Love Peacock's (1818) *Melincourt*. Within each of the categories of philosophy, epistemology and ontology, we witness modern discourses taking shape in the text.

Peacock, a close friend of the poet Shelley, wrote a number of novels in the early nineteenth century in which characters representing caricatured popular intellectual positions gathered at a country house and argued their positions while engaging in a series of adventures together. *Melincourt* is not untypical of his work, and Peacock sets

the novel at Melincourt Castle, home of Anthelia Melincourt, a mysterious beautiful young woman. Among the characters converging on the castle are the rationalist Mr Fax, the humanist Sylvan Forester and his protégé Sir Oran Haut-ton. At one point in the story they make an expedition to visit a Mr Mystic, but this is but one *divertissement* in a romance which will end in marriage [51] between Sylvan and Anthelia. I will trace through the three main discourses under the headings of philosophy, epistemology and ontology.

Philosophy

Views of the world, philosophies, are to be found in Peacock's novel clustered around preoccupations with science and nature. Mr Fax speaks for the scientific method as the route to true knowledge of the natural world and as the root of a solution to the problems of human society. It is no accident that he expresses an interest in both of these issues. With regard to the first, his claim that 'science is both morally and politically neutral' (717) gives an optimistic evolutionary sense to his belief 'in the progress of science and the rapid diffusion of intellectual light' (692). This itself demands the subordination of lower mental faculties and lower classes to 'the intellectual, which is the better part of human nature ... in a progress of rapid improvement, continually enlarging its views and multiplying its acquisitions' (693). Mr Fax, then, is the human being who explains Mr Forester's vision of Anthelia Melincourt, for example, by way of the 'single mental principle' of 'the association of ideas' (679).

Apart from leading us to true knowledge, the other proclaimed benefit of scientific knowledge is its promise to provide the basis for the rational reorganisation of human society. Here Mr Fax is able to counter Mr Forester's vision of the original ideal healthy human being who coexists with nature, for which the 'rapid and sudden mutations of fortune are the inexhaustible theme of history, poetry and romance' (527). Mr Fax adapts his mathematics to Malthusian designs on 'the tendency of the population to increase beyond the means of subsistence' (527), and arrives at a solution: 'The remedy is an universal social compact, binding both sexes to equally rigid celibacy, till the prospect of maintaining the average number of six children be as clear as the arithmetic of futurity can make it' (527).

Together, then, Mr Fax and Mr Forester appeal to a natural progression. Whether 'feelings and poetical images are ... out of place in a calm philosophical view of human society' (526) as Mr Fax contends, or whether 'the qualities of the heart and of the mind are alone out of the power of accident' (551) as Mr Forester argues, is of secondary importance. Mr Forester speaks for the anthropomorphic spirit of modernity, though he does see the rise of industry as an evil: [52] 'The mortality of a manufacturing town, compared with that of a mountain village, is more than three to one' (692). His dialogues with Mr Fax are intended to humanise the mechanisms of classical science Mr Fax supports. However, in some respects he still sees nature as calling for modern help, and the 'evil effects of the natural life' (692) include 'the coacervation of multitudes within the narrow precincts of cities, where the breath of so many animals, and the exhalations from the dead, the dying, and corrupted things of all kinds, make the air little better than a slow poison' (692). The new humanism Mr Forester hopes for, then, is easily drawn out and applied as but a gloss on Mr Fax's positivist position. Discourses of rational truth

coexist with humanist relativist discourse.

Epistemology

Theories about the source of knowledge, epistemology, arise in the text in debates over what it is possible to know and how we can get to know it. When we turn to speculations as to the basis of knowledge, and the meanings of representation in human experience, we find Mr Forester's romanticism conflicting with the introspections of Mr Mystic. When both Mr Forester and Mr Fax are unable to see the grounds surrounding Mr Mystic's lodge because of the fog, they are angrily accused by him of being *'empirical psychologists,* and *slaves of definition, induction, and analysis,* which he intended for terms of abuse, but which were not taken for such by the persons to whom he addressed them' (668-9). For all three, of course, there is a potentially correct view of the world, and a true knowledge is possible and desirable. On certain crucial matters, however, Mr Mystic differs from his two friends for he differentiates, in keeping with the sp t of the new age, between *'objective* and *subjective reality:* and this point of view is *transcendentalism'* (669). The human being thus emerges as the locus of truth and creator of representations of the world and of the self.

Mr Mystic invites Mr Fax and Mr Forester to take a boat across a lake called the *'Ocean of Deceitful Form' to the 'Island of Pure Intelligence'* where he lives (665). The fog which pervades the grounds of the lodge on the island, 'which he had laid out according to the *topography of the human mind' (665),* is only dispelled (and only dispelled for Mr Mystic) by the use of a *'synthetical torch,* which, according to Mr Mystic, *shed around it the rays of transcendental illumination'* (668). Against the positivism of Mr Fax, and the [53] extension of his method into a vision of an organicist society governed by natural laws, to be described by 'the arithmetic of futurity' *(527),* Mr Mystic turns into the mind as the mirror of nature in which scientific knowledge is to be found reflected as personal truth. Against optimistic appeals to natural common sense and common human cause made by Mr Forester, Mr Mystic's vision is deliberately individualistic: 'The materials of political gloom will build the steadfast frame of hope' (670).

Mr Forester does hope to turn reason to the service of nature because he believes that original reason arises there, and so he contends that Mr Mystic is guilty of 'condensing in the human mind the vapours of ignorance and delusion' (672). Mr Mystic unwittingly recirculates the romantic writings of Coleridge. (Direct quotes from the poet are placed in Mr Mystic's mouth by Peacock and footnoted under the text.) He twists them around, and is able to make them mean what he likes. In this case they are used to resist all attempts at order, even ordered reform: 'Science classifies flowers. Can it make them bloom where it has placed them in its classification?' (671) Mr Mystic is, then, in employing this line of argument, acting as a herald of modernity (which he also reveals, in his reinterpretation of Mr Forester's romantic reforms, to be the age of kant). Scientific discourse exists here in tension with a discourse of common sense.

Ontology

Notions of the self, ontology, are marked out by the characters particularly carefully in

discussions of possible distinctions between human and animal life. The alternative title of *Melincourt* is *Sir Oran Haut-ton,* and the sub-text of the novel concerns Mr Forester's attempt to get his friend, who is an orang-outang, recognised as a human being. Sir Oran Haut-ton's 'prodigious physical strength, his uninterrupted health, and his amiable simplicity of manners demonstrate' (513), for Mr Forester, that his friend is 'a specimen of the natural and original man - a genuine facsimile of the philosophical Adam' (513). He has already made him a Baronet, and the next step is to have him elected to Parliament for a rotten borough. What is at stake here is a process of demarcation, in which the category of 'human being' is being redefined. While the old order had emphasised natural, and often supernatural, causes and models as the basis of human experience, the new age saw the phenomenon [54] of the individual self emerge as the source of meaning and enlightenment. Political agency here is closely tied to criteria for distinguishing humanity from 'lower' animals. The problem that becomes intensified, as a necessary by-product, is how to decide what responsibilities, and rights to make meaning, should be attributed to human beings *alone.*

The attribution of causes, as a process embodied in a system of social rules embedded in discourse, changed rapidly in the course of a few centuries. Before the onset of the classical age (organised around the conceptual machinery of truth, natural science and an emphasis on external structures as the source of self-experience), the attribution of responsibility for criminal offences, for example, as codified in legal judgment, was regularly made to animals as well as to human beings. A lay court in France in 1386 tried and sentenced to death a sow which had killed a baby. It was dressed in breeches and jacket and then hung. In 1397 two herds of pigs were condemned to death. Three of the pigs had mauled a child, and their colleagues were tried as accomplices for squealing enthusiastically (though they were released at appeal). In this period a variety of animals were given elaborate trials with prosecution and defence witnesses. One of the most famous of defence counsels gained his legal reputation for securing the acquittal of a ferret on a technicality (Evans, 1906).

Mr Forester's attempt to admit Sir Oran Haut-ton to the realms of humankind is of a piece with his attempts to relieve human suffering and to accord human 'rights' to all. Hence the organisation of the 'anti-saccharine fête to prevent the 'politically abominable' use of sugar as a commodity derived from slavery (646). The championing of the orang-outang, then, was an issue not so much to do with who should not be excluded, but with how those who were to be *included* within the sphere of humanity as sovereign individuals should be attributed political rights and moral faculties. While Mr Forester failed in redrawing the boundaries between the animal and human spheres, he succeeded in reinforcing the conception of the self, as original and foundational, which provides an essential phenomenological support for the structures of modern culture.

Other languages of modernity

There are, of course, many more discourses threading their way through *Melincourt.* Anthelia Melincourt breaks from traditional [55] gender roles in her striving for human sense, tolerance and meaning (her 'twin soul' is Mr Forester), but it is her abduction, her *absence,* which is the narrative pretext for the other assorted male characters to pursue

their debates. There is a tension between a liberal and a reactionary ideology in the text, which is covertly resolved in favour of the latter when Anthelia and Mr Forester marry. Familial discourse gives a particular sense, and institutional form, to the nature of the harmonious relationship between a gentle man and, it turns out, a more than gentle (thoroughly feminine) woman.

A similar contradiction attends the public political activities of Mr Forester. While his saccharine boycott is part of a politically progressive liberal position, the context, the onset of imperialism, in which the orang-outang came to be transported from the forests of Angola and studied as a form of African is necessarily left in silence. Colonialism is the precondition for this text to work, but it is only later on that a colonialist discourse becomes developed and contested as such. There are suppressed discourses which surface to the realms of political debate as modernity develops politically and allows the formation of explicit and recognised spaces of resistance to its oppressive forms. *Melincourt* carries then and now, but in different ways for different audiences, as much sexism and racism as many a modernist text.

A debate which the novel alludes to, and which is picked up again a century and a half later at what sometimes appears to be the end of modernity (where we are now, dear reader), concerns the nature of language and speech. A problem for Mr Forester is that Sir Oran Haut-ton cannot speak; He accounts for this lack by arguing that 'speech is a highly artificial faculty. Civilised man is a highly artificial animal' (521). Alongside this line of defence is the assertion that 'in the nation of the Orans ... drawing, as a means of communicating ideas, may be in no contemptible state of forwardness' (569). We are led to believe that underneath speech there is the more original substrate of 'communication'. This is not *only* caricature on Peacock's part, for Mr Forester's defence of the orang-outang and his theories of language, speech and communication are copiously footnoted with references to contemporary early nineteenth-century debates as to the nature of the orang-outang and the meaning of the animal's failure to speak.

'Speech' in Western discourse is conventionally accorded a privilege over 'writing' because it lies closer to thought, a privilege [56] discussed in post-structuralist writing by Derrida (1983). However, there are different ways of unravelling, of deconstructing, of understanding the relationship between the pairs of that opposition. In Peacock's *Melincourt* at the birth of modernity there is an attempt to guarantee the humanity of a non-speaking being by attributing to him an ability to communicate which is more basic than speech. All communication can be resolved, according to Mr Forester's defence, into the level of *drawing.* So, Sir Oran Haut-ton's lively interaction with a tourist who is sketching is explained as being a natural response to the power of *representation:* 'his delight was excited by seeing the vast scene before him transferred so accurately into so small a compass, and growing, as it were, into a distinct identity under the hand of the artist' (570). As the discourse dynamics of modernity gathered pace, the relationship between language and experience was tangled further with the development of psychoanalysis, and now psychotherapy generally, as a 'talking cure'. The revival of psychoanalytic ideas in recent years would indicate that enlightenment may have changed rather than have simply run its course.

It is worth noting, in contrast, the more pessimistic post-Foucauldian forecasts. In this vision, now, at the supposed end of modernity, deconstructions carried out within the post-structuralist tradition are concerned with resolving the distinction in

the other direction. Speech is dissolved into language, into the 'difference' of texts and discourses. This enterprise is just one 'expression' of the popularisation of the power of language that celebrants of 'post'-modernity promulgate (Lyotard, 1984), an issue I will address in the next chapter.

However, it is important first to locate the development of tensions within the discourses of modernity from its birth, for the existence of contemporary contradictory ideas and fashions can otherwise be inflated far beyond their historical significance. Although times change, we have to be clear in what ways they break from the past and in what ways they *continue* the dynamic of traditional discourses.

CHANGING NARRATIVES

The novel *Melincourt* reproduces the grand narratives of modernity, but we need to situate the development of those narratives. They are not static discourses overarching and informing *all* the things that can [57] be said in Western culture. The very possibility of satire and of contradiction in Peacock's work indicates, as Billig *et al.* (1988) argue, that quandaries and dilemmas are an integral part of enlightened modern thought. In so far as the dominant discourses do inform the many ways in which we speak, they are fragmented, uncertain, contested. There is a dynamic at work in the way the narratives, as part of one optimistic movement, arose early in the modern condition, and the way they have splintered into a range of competing, more pessimistic world-views. Here I want to pursue this argument and temper an analysis of modern discourses informed by a Foucauldian framework with the descriptions offered by Berman in the book *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982).

Berman, sketches the development of a first phase of modernity, from the start of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth, in which modern ideas were starting to gain a hold. It should be remembered that the very notion of the 'modern' was *developed,* not given, within the English language: 'Its earliest English senses were nearer our *contemporary,* in the sense of something existing now.... A conventional contrast between *ancient* and *modern* was established in the Renaissance.... *Modern* in this comparative and historical sense was common from 1C16 [late sixteenth century]' (Williams, 1976: 174). For Berman, the second phase is powered by the cultural shocks of the French Revolution, and it is in this context that Peacock's narrative takes shape. Not only is history moving forward, but it requires a rational, scientific world-view to bring about an equal community in which each person realises their own capacities. Social (political) improvement is closely tied to individual (moral) improvement. Berman's 'third phase', the twentieth century, sees the spread of modernisation. Modernity is exported in technically sophisticated forms of colonialism, and, with the necessary links between 'enlightenment' and oppression, economic discipline and cultural resistance, modern ideas become fragmented and contradictory, for some to an unbearable degree.

This sense of fragmentation is now the cultural backdrop for the rise of a discourse analysis research programme which celebrates variability while trying to find meaning in the incompatible ways of talking which invade every text. The bits, structures of sense which we call 'discourses' or 'interpretative repertoires', are located by Berman (1982) in his evocation of the experience of modernity. The dynamic of the past, grand

narratives of science, progress and individual [58] enlightenment, impels us to make sense of a culture in which those ideas no longer seem to work. Modern built environments, for example, which promise to cut across cultural difference and unite all humanity give rise to an internally contradictory shared experience: ‘it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish’ (Berman, 1982: 15). There is a passage from the *Communist Manifesto,* written in the midst of modern mid-nineteenth-century European political struggle, in 1848, which inspires the title of Berman’s (1982) account, which explains that modern experience is rooted in the continual revolutions in production and innovations in marketing that are necessary for the bourgeoisie to exist:

> [U]ninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation.... All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man *[sic]* is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.
>
> (Marx and Engels, 1965: 367)

In this account, cultural matters are rooted firmly in economic changes, changes which need to be explored using Marxism as a research programme within a realist framework (Bhaskar, 1989). Other accounts of the tensions within the modern age, which deliberately evoke the symbolic dynamics of culture and the coexistence of discourses from the past with those of the present, are to be found in writings on fascism. Fascism, as the ever-present underside of the dialectic of enlightenment, lies hidden within the discourses that comprise the processes of collective remembering (Middleton and Edwards, 1990). This, also a Marxist account, written in the 1930s, has relevance today:

> Today, not only in peasant homes but also in city skyscrapers, there lives alongside of the twentieth century the tenth or the thirteenth. A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic power of signs and exorcisms. The Pope of Rome broadcasts over the radio about the miraculous transformation of water into wine. Movie stars go to the mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man’s [*sic*] [59] genius wear amulets on their sweaters.... Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat.... The programme of ... illusions is ... torn away from reality, and dissolved in ritualistic acts.... If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, then the avenues of the Third Reich are paved with symbols.
>
> (Trotsky, 1933: 41 14)

There is a sense of menace highlighted here, lying within and underneath modern discourses, which is never brought to the surface in Peacock’s writings. It is, perhaps, in more contemporary writers such as Pinter that this menace is expressed as an integral part of the text (Ashton, 1990). The historical descriptions given by Berman, Marx and Engels

and by Trotsky, for example, are not informed by discourse analysis, and we can make sense of what they have to say without it. There are occasions when discourse analysis is not necessary or useful in helping us understand or evaluate texts (Burman, in press b). The grand narratives of modernity explode at times of acute economic and political crisis, but the menace evoked in times of relative calm is just as telling. There are then occasions when we can draw on the understanding of culture that such writings about times of crisis provide to identify discourses in more innocent texts. Billig *et al*'s (1988) argument that we need to attend to implicit meanings in discourse, and that this attention needs to be informed by historical, cultural and political scholarship, is particularly cogent here (Billig, 1988c). Take the following piece of text, for example, in the light of the previous one, and consider what it *could* mean.

> There is a tiny church. Eight centuries of England lie buried around it. It allows a glimpse of an England that has not changed. Of course now there are roads, cars, planes, television. But there is, too, an England as she was: changeless in our fast-changing world.
>
> (Michael Heseltine, 1990)

It is not necessarily on the grounds of authorial responsibility, the grounds traditionally ploughed by psychology and literary theory, that we should worry about such a quote. The images flow from the discourses which inhabit it, and from their contradictory modern dynamics. [60]

DISCURSIVE CHANGES AND TEXTUAL PRACTICES

The changes in culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the close of the twentieth have expressed and produced a multitude of contradictory currents of thought. The form of language itself as discourse is being interrogated and reworked at an increasing pace, and not only in academic life. While the nature of the literary canon and psychological theory has been undergoing a process of upheaval, a correlative reflexive turn to language has been occurring in the 'real' world. Two examples of this are the challenging of conventional interpretations of literary texts and the use of re-interpretation in therapeutic narratives.

The first example, the work of a small regional theatre group in England, concerns the deliberate uses made of literature as text and is just one expression of the reflexive study of post-colonial discourse by some of its subjects. In *The Government Inspector Ala Afsur* by Tara Arts Group (1989), Gogol's classic text is reworked as a piece of theatre which challenges and re-presents received interpretations for an audience in 'post-colonial Britain'. All quotes in this section are from the programme leaflet which presents a reflexive commentary on the performance. The reader of the play is also confronted, as reader of the accompanying gloss on the play, with accounts of the meanings which are being circulated and contested in Gogol's text.

The original play concerns the visit of a Moscow bureaucrat to a remote provincial town where, through mistaken identity devices, the attempts of the local officials and townspeople to impress and manipulate the inspector highlight phenomena of oppression, collaboration, corruption and resistance. The text has travelled to India

where it was translated many times into different Indian languages and performed as a satirical display of colonial relationships between imperialism and the Third World. It returns to Britain, performed in this production by first- and second-generation Asian performers, having accumulated layers of conventions, 'each production has set a "code" of perception and reception', from realism to Indian folk theatre to English farce to Italian *commedia dell'arte.* The issue of the powers of discourse here just cannot be evaded: 'Language being one of the key purveyors of "tradition", TARA ARTS was faced with the question of how it would confront the text: a logical extension of the Company's desire to confront the *manner* of presenting Gogol in Britain.' The rehearsal of the play had [61] to be 'as much about finding ways of "stretching" the classic text - of *confronting* the text - as it has been about "doing" the text'.

The play is now set in a fictitious small town in India just after Independence, and the 'way of seeing' the classic text is 'transformed' through the realignment of quotations, and the use of song, percussion and movement from folk forms. Addressing a variety of audiences about the connections between varieties of colonialism, external and internal, the production opens up a way of reflecting on relationships of power, 'In an effort, ultimately, to challenge received ways of seeing performance and reading texts'.

The second example concerns the uses made of psychology as narrative. In psychotherapy, issues of discourse have come to the fore in discussions of the nature of the 'self' and its relation to literary narratives. In recent issues of the *British Psychological Society Psychotherapy Section Newsletter* connections between post-structuralist literary theory and therapeutic practice have been repeatedly made by different writers. This work is mostly by critical psychologists from the Kellyan tradition of therapy. It is argued that readers of texts construct, and are constructed in, 'stories', and 'affect' is produced through narratives which shift the positions that a reader is called to identify with (Miall, 1990). In therapy 're-storying the past involves a struggle *between* narratives - between the stories that the patient brings to therapy and the ones the patient and the therapist begin to construct together' (Macmillan, 1989: 23).

Some therapists are going so far as to argue that psychology should become a 'discipline of discourse', because '[w]ords and structures in language shape us more than we shape them. We are vehicles for the conventions of language more often than we are achievers of something more unique' (Mair, 1989: 8). Again, this is not a simple academic suggestion, for the turn to discourse is having an impact even on the training of clinical psychologists. The 'objective' case study produced by the 'scientist-practitioner' is giving way to narrative approaches in which there is a form of writing which encourages reflection (Green, 1989). The construction of narratives takes place within relationships between trainee and professional and between therapist and client, and discourse contains accounts central to social relations, 'stories do, in fact, constitute the very substance of the whole human enterprise' (Salmon, 1989: 45).

In Australia connections have also been made, through developments in family therapy, with Foucauldian notions of [62] discourse, in which the therapist has to take account of the 'stock of culturally available discourses that are considered appropriate and relevant to the expression or representation of particular aspects of experience (White and Epston, 1989: 31). Relations of power/knowledge pervade the therapeutic encounter, and the client is encouraged to 'externalise' the problem rather than treating it as their responsibility (with the attendant responsibility on the client's part

to cure it with the truth obtained through professional help): 'Through this process of externalisation, a person gains a reflexive perspective on their lives, and new options become available to them in challenging the "truths" that they experience as specifying of them and their relationships. This assists them to refuse the objectification or "thingification" of themselves and their bodies through knowledge' *(ibid.:* 33).

In different ways, both of these textual and narrative practices in these two examples are centrally concerned with empowerment. The slide from description to prescription in literary or psychological representations of action and experience is deconstructed, and new forms of subjectivity and social relations are called into life. It would be possible, tempting even, to take fright at this intensification of discursive self-reflection, and to conclude that the grand narratives of modern enlightenment thought are breaking down. There was always, though, a contested nature to the ideological systems of thought I drew out of my reading of Peacock, and the resistance to ideology was embedded in the text in its nature as a *satirical* text. Now the use of dramatic forms to draw attention to patterns of oppression in language and the use of therapeutic reflection to focus on patterns of repression in language are emancipatory accomplishments which must go beyond the frames of single academic disciplines.

The connections between literature and psychology throw into question the dominant explanations elaborated within each as a self-enclosed field of discovery and confirmation. Those who make the connections can no longer take the claims to truth in each seriously. They then worry about what happens to those who do, and they open up more space for this satirical work. The reflexive parody of ideological systems subverts them at the very moment it characterises them, and this then continues to provide spaces of power and resistance as necessary dilemmas of enlightenment thought. As an aspect of the maelstrom of modernity, this is a necessary part of the process of transforming and rewriting the [63] received truths of academic and institutional power from the base up. This progressive impulse, the tension within modern discourses which makes the reproduction *and* transformation of social life possible, also makes the demystification of postmodern accounts of culture an urgent one. I turn to that problem next. [end of page 63]