



In conversation with... **FANITA ENGLISH**

EATA Gold Medal Award winner 2010, and twice winner of the Eric Berne Memorial Award, Fanita English, talks to **ALASTAIR MOODIE** about her career, her continuing engagement with TA and celebrating her 95th birthday this October.

Fanita, tell me a little bit about your early years?

I was an only child and I was born in 1916 in Romania during the First World War. The Bulgarian troops were advancing and my pregnant mother fled from southern Romania to the town of Galatz in the north. My father was in the army at the time. So I was born in my grandfather's home. My aunt (my mother's sister) was also there. So, for the first four years of my life, my parents were really my grandfather and my aunt.

My grandfather was president of the Jewish community in Galatz. At the time Jewish boys were being given a very hard time in the army. He saw it as his task to get as many Jewish boys as possible to America before they got to be 16 – the draft age. The setting into which I was born was a house with a large living room and study for my grandfather at one end of the house and my mother and my aunt at the other end of the house. As soon as I could walk and run my thrill was to run to my grandfather's waiting room where the fathers of these boys were waiting to petition him. So I always got to be in the centre of a very supportive group.

What did your Father do?

He was in the services at that time but he had a Ph.D. in chemistry from Zurich University (Switzerland). Romania had oil reserves and he had worked for an oil company. He left the Army in 1921 and returned to Romania where he got into conflict with his anti-Semitic boss. The oil company had a problem with this because they had

become international and bragged to have hired a Jew with a Ph.D. They called him Dr Blumberg. Rather than the embarrassment of firing him they transferred him to Istanbul to run the business in the Near East.

How were you affected by this?

Suddenly at the age of four or five I got this father whom I didn't know and my mother whom I knew less well than my aunt. We moved away from these two parents, my grandfather and my aunt, whom I loved, to live in Turkey.

This sudden change was so important in terms of my life. Before, I had experienced feeling wonderful and stroked in the middle of a group of people even though I hadn't known them – as in workshops. And then the opposite happened. As an only child from the age of four or five I became very isolated. Except for some friends in school, it was a lonely life. So I am both someone who is very happy in the middle of a bunch of strangers, but really not at all sociable, preferring solitude.

Then during the Second World War you fled from Paris to America, making America your home in 1942. And yet you have never acquired an American accent?

No, and I never adopted a British accent even though I attended an English school in Istanbul all the way from kindergarten to high school graduation!

But you are multilingual?

Yes, that comes from having been raised in Istanbul and

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learning the languages in childhood.

Starting with Romanian of course, but father decided that we should speak French at home and I had to speak English at school where there were ten different nationalities. One friend was Russian and another was Jewish Spanish. We had a Greek housekeeper and so I picked up Greek with her. When I was eight years old I spent the summer with a German carer because my mother was ill and so I picked up German.

Do you think of yourself as a world citizen?

Yes, I do.

How did you find your way into psychoanalysis?

In France in 1938 there was a new Institute of Psychoanalysis which I attended while I was also studying psychology at the Sorbonne. In America they accepted only psychiatrists for training in analysis. I got a Master's degree in social work and then later I managed to convince the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis to accept me on the basis that I had started training in Europe.

Eventually I went into private practice as a therapist but I became very disenchanted with psychoanalysis. In 1964 I was given a book by a colleague; it was *TA in Psychotherapy* by Eric Berne. Reading it was very exciting. The very next day I called San Francisco and Eric Berne answered the telephone! It happened to be just ten minutes before the start of a seminar.

I was the very first student at the new TA training institute in Carmel, California, with Berne, David Kupfer, Robert Goulding and Mary Edwards (later Goulding). Fortunately David Kupfer was really my trainer.

You have always taken a very independent line on Berne's theory, haven't you?

I had to because I was already 48 years of age and all the others were young people. I had a lot of theory and 10

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years of practice behind me. I wasn't just going to swallow everything uncritically and so I fought with Berne. He would say one thing and then the next day he would say the opposite.

So he was often changing his mind?

Yes, and this was part of his creative process. But he was also suspicious of me because he saw me as a psychoanalyst, even though I had given it up.

We know that you are a feisty person with a very independent mind.

I stayed with TA due to David Kupfer and my therapeutic approach was greatly influenced by him.

How would you describe your therapeutic approach?

Contract and ego states, understood as three systems. And then my additions to TA theory: firstly, survival conclusions focusing very much on developmental processes. I had been a child therapist and so I'm very attuned to the Child ego state that is made up of very different children according to their ages. I distinguish between survival conclusions integrated within different layers of a person's Child ego state and the narrative script.

I am always interested in the difference (battle?) between the Child and the Parent and the inner dialogue that is going on all the time. I also think in terms of the three unconscious drives that operate through Child, Parent and Adult.

That seems to me one of your distinctive contributions: your understanding of unconscious motivators.

I call the three drives (or 'motivators') the three 'goddesses': Survia (for survival, reality testing), Passia (for the expressive, creative, sexual), Transcia (for transcendence, escape from reality). Survia is the only one that operates in chronological time. The best up-to-date summary can be found in my article '*Resilience after trauma*'.

What does TA mean to you today?

For me TA is important for everything. TA is how I think and how I feel. However, I aim for the fifth position.

Will you explain the fifth position, Fanita?

I look at existential positions developmentally. A baby is born OK but I call it 'Euphoric OK' because the newborn baby can't think; it is simply in Paradise. Then comes the period between six and nine months which Melanie Klein called the stage of depression and I call the stage of despair and 'Not OK'. The baby becomes conscious that the mother is not always available or helpful and therefore 'Not OK' either. It is Paradise Lost – the experience of terrible disenchantment. So that is the 'I'm

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Not OK – You're Not OK' position.

Then at ages three, four or five the child has to get out of the despair to survive. There are two possible defensive positions: either 'I'm not OK – You're OK' where the caretaker is more controlling or 'I'm OK – You're not OK' where the caretaker is neglectful or incompetent. The former is the Type 1 position, creating the 'Under-sure' character and the latter is Type 2 with the 'Over-sure' character.

Ideally we then move into what I call 'the fifth position' which is 'I'm OK – You're OK Adult' where we have the use of the Adult ego state to avoid dangerous racketeering and game switches. By contrast the euphoric OK first position is idealistic and naïve.

I wrote a book that applies all this to Shakespeare's Hamlet (Type 1) and Othello (Type 2). It was published in Germany.

What do you feel especially proud of in your long career?
I am very proud of TA in Germany, where I brought it, and also my work elsewhere on the continent.

Here's one last question for you. What's the secret of your vitality?

I love to do workshops and I work primarily with my Child and with 'Passia', as in my grandfather's waiting room. TA has allowed me to recapture the good 'script' feeling when I work in groups. I was very different before TA – quite passive, adapted and uncomfortable. I changed a great deal, thanks to TA.

In October I shall be 95. I still like to exercise by swimming every day. I've done that for the past sixty years. You may remember, Alastair, the trouble I put you to about locating swimming pools at the time of the World Conference (2005) in Edinburgh! Many belated thanks for your gracious courtesy then, and now with this interview.

Thank you, Fanita. It has been lovely to speak to you and to hear about your thinking and your experiences.

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III Awards

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2010 EATA Gold Medal Award for outstanding contributions to Transactional Analysis and European TA community



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