It takes a lifetime to play out a script

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> "Since no one is someone without a disguise,
> And the truths of the parlor in the bedroom are lies,
> And my everyday self is a shoddy disgrace,
> I have put on these masks to show you my face"
>
> (Maurice English, 1964)

Any parent or kindergarten teacher will confirm that between the ages of three to six, children "ask the darn'd-est questions". Favourites from my personal collection include: "Where does the white go when the snow melts?" "Will grandma care for my dead hamster when she goes to heaven?", or, from little Oedie, "Mama, will you marry me when I grow up?"

Isn't that the question Sigmund Freud overheard his little son ask Martha Freud? Oh dear! What a monstrous idea at such a young age! Due to his own discomfiture about this question, or others, such as, "Why does little sister not have a dangling thing like mine?" he assumed that all little boys might from now on fear the fate of Oedipus—to be punished for killing their father and sleeping with their mother, even in fantasy.

In the original Greek myths known by Freud, fate plays many other tricks on humans as well: Oedipus is said to have first faced a threatening Sphinx who asked him a riddle: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs during the day and three legs at night?" Oedipus correctly answered: "A human being." Here, I believe, there may well be a hidden reversal of roles, as is often the case with myths. Consider that it is not the Sphinx who asks the question, but young Oedipus who asks the age-old question to which children want answers from their powerful, Sphinx-like parents, specifically: "What is a human being?", or, more personally, "Who am I, and what will be my fate?"

In the Spanish popular song, "Que sera, sera" ("Whatever will be, will be"), a daughter (let's call her Angie, short for Antigone) asks her mother a similar question. It is the question all four- to six-year-olds wonder about, now that they are learning the many meanings of "later" ("You can have your candy *later*") and of the future, when they will be "grown up"("You'll get to drive the car all by yourself when you are grown up!").

It is the mysterious Sphinx, representing fate, rather than Oedipus, who can actually answer the central question about the past, present, and future of human beings by pronouncing, "They start helplessly crawling on four limbs until they can walk on two legs. But then they weaken and need a cane as a third leg!" From its broad perspective about Past and Future, the Sphinx might have added, "For you, young Oedipus, life ahead will bring many tasks and challenges, both painful and exciting, some due to the efforts—and errors—of your ancestors, just as you will pass on the results and consequences of your activities to future generations, until you become old and ready to leave this earth."

To the ancient Greeks, fate determined Oedipus's experiences; to Freud, anatomy is destiny. But neither assumption can satisfy little Oedie, for both imply that he will not be master of his own destiny. Nor is little Angie satisfied with her mother's answer, "Whatever will be, will be!" Both Oedie and Angie want to craft their own future and not just leave it to fate.

Survival conclusions

Earlier, between the ages of two and four, having developed the

physical ability to walk and run with ease, Oedie and Angie felt adventurous and and driven to explore their environment, as do all children at that stage of development. However, unlike other animals, young children lack sufficient hard-wired instincts to avoid accidents (Siegel, 2001), for instance from getting burnt by getting too close to an open fire or to boiling water on a stove, or falling into a lake or swimming pool and drowning. So, care-takers must give them messages intended to keep them safe. These may be reinforced with positive strokes ("Darling, watch out!") or negative ones ("don't let me ever again catch you . . ."). Eventually, children integrate such messages as their own "survival conclusions"; then these operate throughout their lives with a power similar to conditioned reflexes or to the instinctive survival reactions of other animals.

Regrettably, some grown-up persons also carry what are called "archaic survival conclusions". These were useful in childhood when they were developed, but they can be harmful later in life (English, 1977). For instance Tom, a successful junior executive, felt a strong urge to hide under his desk whenever his supervisor came into his office. Tom had recently been promoted and moved from a cubicle to his own office. He realized that his excessive reaction occurred because the enthusiastic supervisor often allowed Tom's office door to slam shut when he came in. With some help, Tom recognized that somehow an archaic "survival conclusion" was being activated like a conditioned reflex when the door slammed. He then recalled that, as a child, he used to hide under the bed whenever he heard the entrance door bang loudly; it meant his father was coming in drunk and might hit him. After he realized that his childhood conclusion was "Slamming doors means danger", he found ways to manage his reaction, for instance by holding on tightly to his desk. He continued to have some minimal anxiety whenever he heard the door slam, but it decreased gradually after he allowed himself to tell the supervisor lightly that hearing the door slam disconcerted him. Accordingly the supervisor began to close the door more gently.

Time moves on

At about age five, Oedie and Angie have integrated sufficient survival conclusions to stay safe most of the time, although they

may also have developed a few archaic ones. They have also received plenty of additional messages and instructions from their care-takers to help them adapt to some family and cultural expectations (like "say please" when you ask).They follow these most of the time, especially when these are reinforced with shaming, to which young children are particularly vulnerable.

Oedie and Angie have also discovered that they themselves can influence their care-takers' behaviour—sometimes even with just a smile. At other times they fail; their care-takers just seem plain arbitrary ("You may not wear your new red shoes tomorrow!").

Now they can differentiate themselves from others as distinct persons, with thoughts and feelings, although feelings are often nebulous and cannot always be translated into words. They try to figure out: Just who am I? ("My, how you've grown, now you're big!" say visiting relatives.) Are they "big" or "little"? They struggle to establish their identity instead of just being appendages to their mother or family (Erickson, 1950). Anyway, they can now speak clearly and *remember* what they have been told: for instance, to put on boots before going outside.

They can *choose* for themselves, as "I" or "me" ("*I* don't want nuts, give *me* candy!"). Yet, often, they cannot choose between doing what their parents tell them to do or following some strange urges within them. They are still adventurous. Parents may say things such as, "What got into you, climbing up that tree, or running off and playing with that strange kid, when we specifically told you not to?"—well, Oedie and Angie cannot answer such questions any better than their parents answered many of theirs. They shrug and say, "I just felt like it!"

As they move towards the indistinct future, they are still filled with curiosity. They wonder: who and what will I be? ("What will you be when you grow up?") That future: where and when will it start, and how will it continue? Near the sea, on a mountain, in a city, on battlegrounds or idyllic fields? With whom? What friends? Will they marry? What does that mean? And children? Or no, none—maybe become a visionary, guru, saint . . . beach-bum? Corporate giant? Farmer? Nurse? Explorer? Healer? Dictator? Blacksmith? Army chief? Inventor? Pilot? Who will be around? Also: how much power will they have over others or others over them? Will they impress the world? What help can they expect? From whom and for what?

Oedie and Angie look for their own story

Whenever they asked "When?" or "What?", answers from different people were often contradictory. So, they sought additional ideas from the many stories, cartoons, television, and films they were exposed to, or from whatever they overheard or saw when grown-ups did not know they were being observed. Many stories show how the hero or heroine prevails happily after many trials and tribulations, though many tales are scary and gory (Campbell, 1956).

Eventually they try to imagine *their own* story. They cannot yet quite formulate it in words, although they have a sense of it, so they combine a few stories in their idiosyncratic way, with many inherent contradictions, which they do not recognize as such. For instance, the hero may get himself killed, but he is resurrected and becomes a king; or the heroine is dragged off by the dragon, but later she becomes a queen with many children in a distant land.

All along, they wonder: what are these strange urges and feelings that come over them as they consider their lives?

Berne and transactional analysis

A modern-day Sphinx appears on the horizon to offer an answer. It is none other than Eric Berne. He tells them that these strange feelings are because they experience an inner necessity to form what he calls "scripts" for their future, and he explains:

> Each person has an unconscious life plan, formulated in his earliest years, which he takes every opportunity to further . . . The original drama, the protocol, is usually completed . . . often by the age of 5. . . . It becomes largely forgotten, (unconscious), and is replaced by . . . the script proper . . . of which the individual is not actively aware (preconscious) but which can be brought into consciousness by appropriate procedures. . . . The similarity to the development of theatrical and movie scripts is evident. . . . Some scripts may take years or even a whole lifetime to play out. [Berne, 1963, p. 167]

Berne was a psychoanalyst who developed transactional analysis as a refined, effective, limited cost-and-time treatment method. It was based on his discovery that our ego can be subdivided into

three different ego states, to which he gave the colloquial names of Child, Parent, and Adult. Each ego state has its own coherent system of feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (Berne, 1961, p. 17). He also showed that since strokes, defined as units of recognition (Berne, 1972, p. 23), were essential to survival in infancy, all of us continue to seek them throughout life, literally and in symbolic forms. Therefore much of communication consists of transactions with others for exchanges of strokes.

However, stroke exchanges are not always smooth. Some people do not realize that assumptions they make about others are due to images in their own minds rather than to accurate appraisals. They may seek to transact with another person when that other person happens to be a different ego state than the one addressed. For instance, George, feeling insecure and actually wanting sympathy for an issue that troubles him, asks Mary a question from his Child ego state, expecting an encouraging Parent response as a start for further transactions whereby he can ask her further questions. Instead, Mary, who is currently concentrating on a project, simply offers George brief information from her Adult ego state. Thereby, George is frustrated. She did not respond from the Parent ego state he expected.

Many people fail to assess either their own ego state or that of the person from whom they seek responses at the particular time when they seek to transact with someone, often because they repeatedly seek to reproduce the kinds of transactions they experienced when they were growing up. Or they may "racketeer" over and over with erroneous assumptions in the ill-conceived hope of seducing or forcing others to respond the way they want them to. Thus, the very contacts they yearn for are broken when even potentially responsive partners get tired of repetitious pleas or demands (English, 1976). Thus, some persons seem to be playing harmful "Games" (Berne, 1972, p. 23), as though they want to end up frustrated, or anger the other person.

In a transactional analysis treatment group, clients are helped to identify whatever non-productive or harmful transactions they engage in so they can improve their relationships and their lives. In addition, they can uncover and modify archaic "survival conclusions" from early childhood, or change harmful "decisions" made in later childhood (Goulding & Goulding, 1976). Eventually, clients

can achieve what Berne called "social control" (Berne, 1961, p. 90), the ability to function well in their society as autonomous adults.

A script!

While developing transactional analysis, Berne recognized that we all carry scripts which unconsciously structure how our lives may develop. He defined a script as in the quote above.

As a children's therapist before becoming a transactional analyst, I, also, saw how, at about the age of five, children seem to feel internally driven, or motivated by their genetic endowment, to imagine or conceptualize patterns for their future. Berne's proposition that life plans, or scripts, are started early on, corresponded to my experience.

A script is first developed by a child as an imaginative organizing structure that supports his or her development and the evolution of his or her innate potential. It becomes a protective mental bulwark against becoming overwhelmed by a multiplicity of internal and external stimuli. Without a script, a child would experience existence in a vacuum of time and space, like a leaf in the wind, rootless, without content to connect the past with the future. I suspect that certain cases of severe emotional disorders represent *lack* of script formation, rather than the reverse.

Berne's idea that the child's development of this early life plan can be compared to the development of a film script also corresponds to my observations. In such an analogy, a story written by an author gets re-written as a film script, is re-worked by many others, then acted and filmed. After editing, the final film may seem quite different from the initial story, but it could not have been conceptualized without it.

Similarly, a script starts out as a dynamic vehicle for a young child dealing with innate "structure hunger" (Berne, 1961, pp. 85, 88) and what I will later describe as unconscious inner Motivators. It begins as a convoluted, open-ended story with one or more central characters in situations that symbolize wishes, fears, hopes, questions, and attitudes to others or to themselves as felt or experienced so far. It helps a growing child conceptualize and imaginatively catapult the image of his/her emerging self on to the future

in regard to location, boundaries, aspirations, relationships, activities, and much else, including feelings and values. Thus, it establishes the young person's first picture of him or herself in the world. Even a script generated under the worst environmental circumstances contains within itself the child's own genetic sense about how he/she might attain fulfilment in life if some malevolent spirits or fairies can be neutralized.

At each stage of development, the script gets updated. In time, a few secondary stories are tacked on to the original sketch. Often, they seem opposite to the original story; they correspond to efforts to include new experiences. Then changes and magical reversals occur at adolescence and even much later, with some scenes that follow sequentially and some not, potentially leading either to positive or negative outcomes according to the manner in which the stories intermesh and evolve.

Yet, all along, there are common denominators with the child's original sketch that are clearly specific to a particular individual and his/her life style. Ultimately, the script represents the person's own mythological life story, with some improvisations and variations reflecting successive events and new insights. Thus is the script's original function maintained: to support the person as he/she seeks to use whatever inherent abilities he/she has for creative self expression and satisfactory relationships in the "now" and the future.

Scripts are not pathological phenomena

By definition, therapists see more self-sabotaging, unhappy persons than well-balanced, productive ones. Although Berne did state early on that "a practical and constructive script ... may lead to great happiness" (Berne, 1961, p. 116), most of his examples were of scripts that played out tragically.

I believe it is important to realize that script development is *a normal process* that occurs for all of us, at its own pace, not a pathological one. Yet, from the beginning, Berne discussed scripts primarily in the context of psychotherapy, stating, "Script analysis, whose aim might be called 'life plan control' is so complex, that this stage may never be reached in many therapy groups" (Berne, 1961, p. 91).

If we are to assume that someone's script is to be analysed *in the context of therapy*, the implication is that it may need to be controlled like a wild aspect of the self, comparable to the psychoanalytic "id". This assumption led many of Berne's followers to emphasize erroneously that harmful parental messages are the principal *cause* for the formation of scripts, whereas he clearly indicated, as in the quote at the beginning of this paper, that *script formation is a part of each individual's developmental process*. To my horror, I have heard some therapists proclaim that they want their patients to "get rid of their scripts", confusing the fact that script formation is a personal creative endeavour with the fact that some individuals may integrate harmful messages from their parents or their culture and arrive at unhealthy decisions that affect their lives.

Of course, treatment is advisable for individuals who suffer as a result of traumatic experiences or relationships of the past. Also, therapy may be necessary to identify and perhaps modify one or more archaic "survival conclusions" or counter-productive "decisions" that were internalized due to harmful messages or "injunctions" previously given by care-takers, whether intentionally or not (Goulding & Goulding, 1976). True, distorted perceptions or unproductive attitudes may, indeed, affect some aspects of someone's script negatively, the way, for instance, blocked bronchial passages may impede the lungs' optimal functions. However, the doctor would not cut out the lungs in such a case! When behaviours or attitudes that are harmful are modified through psychotherapy or otherwise, the script becomes decontaminated on its own without additional therapeutic interventions.

I believe Berne tried too hard to turn script analysis into a science. Although he conceded that "script analysis cannot attain the precision and certainty of mouse psychology or bacteriology" (Berne, 1972, p. 302), he devised far too technical a system for script analysis, with "framework", "data", and precise diagrams for assumed causative influences, whereas scripts are actually artistic productions with many hidden personal symbolic meanings for the persons who devise them. They cannot be dissected or objectified like mathematical theorems.

Also, Berne defined too rigidly and mechanically the difference between "winners", whom he referred to as "princes or princesses", and "losers", whom he called "frogs" (Berne, 1972, p. 37). The idea

was that script analysis could turn frogs "back" into princes or princesses, with the implication, again and again, that it is "parental programming" that causes "losers".

In such a formula, no distinction is made among the many aspects of our lives—for it is possible for a person to be a "winner" in worldly success, or reputation, or finances, or athletics, or art, or in many other areas, and yet be a "loser" about intimate relationships.

Berne himself was a "winner" as a writer, doctor, and brilliant innovator of new theories that have improved the lives of millions. This did not necessarily make him a winner in other areas!

I feel very sad as I write this, for, tragically, Berne died in 1970 at the age of sixty. His father died at about the same age. This has led some followers to claim that Berne died because of his script, disregarding the role of genes! Berne knew he had a congenital heart condition and occasionally expressed the fear that his own life would be similarly cut short. Thence, the urgency with which he wrote his last book, entitled *What Do You Say After You Say Hello: The Psychology of Human Destiny*. It was published posthumously in 1972. Although he distributed some chapters during his lifetime, he himself did not get to revise the book, so it contains a number of inconsistencies.

Between the date of his first book on transactional analysis, entitled *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy: A Systematic Individual and Social Psychiatry* (1961), and his untimely death in 1970, Berne only had nine years to develop his theories; compare to Freud's thirty-nine years, which allowed for many revisions! So, it is not surprising that there are aspects of Berne's theories that were not revised sufficiently in the light of experience. For instance, near the end of his last book, he cautions against what he calls the "danger of Procrustes", explaining, ". . . the scientist has a theory, and then stretches, cuts down or weighs the data to match it" (Berne, 1972, p. 407). Later, he admits that "there is no doubt" that he may have succumbed to similar errors, since script development is "a complex concept, in its early stage of development" (p. 408).

Episcripting

Berne and some other therapists sometimes erroneously equated

liminal "injunctions" given by pathological care-takers during a person's childhood. Thereby, the individual might feel inescapably bound to later implement certain damaging actions against the self or others. This process must be recognized as constituting the *episcripting* of a vulnerable individual for the specific purpose of destructive or tragic results. Such a *pathological process of control is outside of script development*, though often confused with it. ("Epi" is the Greek word for "outside of".) However, it may undermine or interfere with healthy script development, just as a cancerous growth may interfere with the development or function of a physical organ.

Episcripting is a process I discovered in 1968 (English, 1969). Berne did me the honour of immediately recognizing the validity of my contribution and summarized it in his last book (Berne, 1972, p. 292), though he did not get around to working with its implications. These might have led him to revise some of his views about tragic scripts.

How "hot potato" transfers generate episcripts

Episcripting occurs when an influential "donor", who is himself or herself burdened with unresolved trauma, transfers a "hot potato" (a lifelong sense of obligation to fulfil a destructive task) to a "vulnerable recipient", who feels powerless or dependent in relation to the donor, as is a child or a suggestible individual, or someone preconditioned by circumstances to make him/her particularly ready or eager to be influenced. This "hot potato" transfer is accomplished by the donor's repeated suggestions, like hypnotic propositions given to someone under hypnosis, except that the vulnerable recipient who is unknowingly subjected to this process remains in the hypnotic "trance" right up to accomplishing the assigned obligation, even if it takes many years.

When I originally identified this process, I believed it occurred only with children in pathological families, since it depends on a power relationship whereby the "donor" has particular psychological power over the "vulnerable recipient". Such a donor might be a parent, a grandparent, or other care-taker. Later, I realized that the "donor" may be someone outside the family, such as a teacher,

religious leader, or even a therapist, if the "vulnerable recipient" feels dependent and is suggestible, regardless of age.

Neither donors of episcripts nor vulnerable recipients are likely to seek individual treatment. However, the process of "hot potato transmission" can sometimes be identified almost incidentally in the course of marital or family therapy, or in recreational work with youth groups. This is because, often, "vulnerable recipients" deliberately try to be "contagious" for one or more additional "vulnerable recipients", such as younger siblings, or close friends, or a marital partner. They do this unconsciously, hoping to transfer their own "hot potato" harmful assignment to someone else. Sometimes, thereby, they experience some temporary relief; but usually, even when the "contagion" being passed on to someone else works, they themselves still continue to carry the original episcript.

Anyway, it is important for therapists to know about episcripts and their potential contagious ramifications so that they can distinguish between episcripts, which are pathological, and scripts, which are normal.

Suicide bombers, episcripts, and contagion

As a tragic illustration of the above phenomenon, consider the young men who were the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Theirs was not an impulsive act, but rather a carefully worked out project that took intelligence, skill, and preparation time. I believe a possible explanation about their behaviour is that they were episcripted by Osama bin Laden, whose goal is to harm America. For whatever reasons, including belief systems from childhood, these young men were psychologically vulnerable to the fanatic power of the charismatic bin Laden, so they took on the obligation to carry out an enormously destructive project. As happens with firmly developed episcripts, they may have believed that they were fulfilling their own goals in committing their murderous attack at the cost of their own lives.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the many economic, social, political, and religious reasons for the epidemic of suicide bombers that is going on in the world. However, the phenomena of "hot potato transmissions" and "contagions" that I referred to above as potentially occurring within families and youth

groups may be worth thinking about by sociologists and political scientists.

For our purposes, I summarize: an episcript is to a script what a cancer is to healthy organs. Also, it can spread on to other vulnerable recipients by "contagion", like a virus.

Models from Greek mythology

Like Freud, Berne was fascinated by Greek mythology. Also like Freud, who used the Oedipus myth for psychological theory, Berne focused on Greek tragedies as models for scripts. For instance, he referred extensively to Sophocles's trilogy, *Oedipus Rex*, where the failings of ancestors predetermine the fate of their offspring, or to plays such as *Medea*, where you can anticipate the tragic ending from the very beginning. Yet, he did not refer to the well-known fact that the tragic endings of these plays are related to the heroes' "hubris" or arrogance, which blinds them to the fact that humans do not have total control over life and fate.

Just because a five-year-old child initially designs a script with unrealistic fantasies and has some "blind spots" due to the ignorance of youth, it does not mean that his/her script must end like a Greek tragedy any more than like a Harry Potter story! Also, scripts do get revised as a person grows up.

Nevertheless the ancient Greeks can offer us inspiration. Like us, the Greeks believed that we humans carry responsibility for our lives and choices. However, what we ascribe to factors beyond our conscious control, like world affairs, genetics, or even unconscious feelings, they ascribed to fate and the influences of various Olympic gods and goddesses.

If, then, we want a model for the evolution of a script, why not look at the proto-typical Greek hero, Ulysses (now called Odysseus) in Homer 's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, where Odysseus is sustained by his script as he deals with successive unforeseen challenges? Here he is.

Odysseus (Ulysses)

Important aspects of Odysseus's original script may have been to be a "resourceful" ruler of Ithaca, have a dog, marry a faithful wife, and raise a fine son to succeed him.

However, world events can break into people's scripts. Because Paris carted off King Agamemnon's wife, Helen, all the Greek kings were honour bound to go to attack Troy. Odysseus did not want to leave Ithaca and fight, so he pretended to be crazy to avoid doing so. However, as he ploughed his land, Palimedes suddenly threw Odysseus's baby into the furrow. Rather than hurt his child, Odysseus stopped abruptly, thus inadvertently demonstrating he was competent. Therefore, he was obliged to sail off to war. (Social forces can sidetrack individual purposes.)

After ten years, Troy was conquered and Odysseus prepared to sail home. However, Poseidon, god of the oceans, wanted to drown him to revenge for Troy's defeat. (How unfair! Odysseus had not wanted this war!) The goddess Athene, who favoured Odysseus, appealed to Zeus on his behalf. Zeus wanted to please Athene, but also to placate Poseidon, so he decreed that Odysseus could escape drowning if he could overcome a series of deathly trials on the way home. (Unexpected challenges are part of life.)

There followed a series of dangers, as "resourceful" Odysseus sailed forward. He overcame each threat in turn, thanks to his many talents. His craftiness saved him and his men from the Cyclops. With expert skill he sailed his ship between Scylla and Charybdis. Self-knowledge helped him anticipate that he might not resist the lure of the dangerous Sirens' songs, so he had his sailors tie him to the mast as his ship sailed past their island.

Nevertheless, eventually his ship was shattered and he was stranded on "shining" Kalypso's magical island. She became enamoured of him, and offered him many inducements to stay there. He, however, maintained his script's goals. Only after she let him build a new boat and outfit it did he enjoy lovemaking with her. He then convinced her to let him sail back to Ithaca. But Poseidon,"shaker of the earth", got Odysseus shipwrecked again. (Call it unpredictable weather or angry Providence!) This time, after more efforts, Odysseus got himself tossed on to the beach at Ithaca.

Finally, though in tattered clothes, Odysseus was back in Ithaca, in accordance with his script. He was recognized by those he loved—his dog, his old nurse, and his wife, and acknowledged by his son, he of the next generation whom Odysseus could now empower as future ruler of Ithaca as he himself regained possession of his home with his faithful wife, Penelope. Having fulfilled the

goals of his life script, Odysseus could now proceed to meet his ancestors . . . .

Odysseus's story illustrates the vicissitudes of a person's basic script as he/she travels through life. We can never fully anticipate our fate—we do not choose the family and community into which we are born, or world events like war or famine or genocides, which may decisively affect our choices. Yet, those of us who have a lucky star may get to fulfil the goals of our scripts to the extent that the vagaries of evolution, society, and our own aptitudes, tendencies, and needs will allow.

Significantly, Odysseus's script sustains him by offering him goals, yet he is also fully alive in the moment, able to take on unexpected challenges and experience excitement and pleasure. Similarly, as we move through life, we, also, can gain support from our scripts at difficult times and also enjoy the challenges and pleasures of life.

Unconscious motivators

As mentioned previously, scripts are conceived due to genetic tendencies, which I refer to as "motivators". (My concepts are indirectly derived from Freud, Jung, Perls, Berne, and others.)

As I see it, we operate from birth to death under the influence of what I call *three unconscious motivators*, namely: *Survival*, *Expressive*, and *Quiescence.* They affect us in turn rather than operating simultaneously, for each motivator has different functions determined by the vagaries of evolution.

To conceptualize these unconscious motivators, I imitate the Ancient Greeks by imagining them as three goddesses who may influence us or affect our lives, each in accordance with her own inclinations, just the way Athena, Poseidon, and Zeus affected Odysseus's life in different ways at different times without totally determining his entire life.

Since it is difficult to visualize how our three motivators interact without seeing images, I have used a videotape entitled *The Forces Within Us* (English, 1998) to present each motivator in the form of a goddess who may influence our thoughts, feelings, and actions at different times, for better or worse. Elsewhere, I have

described our motivators in detail (English, 2003). For our purposes, here is a brief summary.

The three motivators

1. *The survival motivator* is attuned to physical needs and functions to ensure the survival of the individual. It stimulates feelings and needs for action to ensure such survival. Therefore, it brings on emotions or reactions such as hunger, thirst, feeling temperature, also fear, anxiety, and need for protection. It promotes stroke transactions and survival conclusions.

2. *The expressive, or creative motivator* functions to ensure the survival of the species. Sexual procreation would not have sufficed for the survival of the human species. We would have been annihilated long ago by more powerful animals. Our species survives thanks to attributes of this motivator, such as curiosity, imagination, creativity, risk-taking, and attraction to adventure, in addition to sexuality. These enabled our forebears to transmit the benefits of their inventions and discoveries.

3. *The quiescence motivator* functions to relate the individual to the broader Cosmos. It gets us to reduce the frantic activity often stimulated by the two other motivators. For instance, it brings on spirituality, aspirations for transcendence, and also sleep. It fosters peacefulness, meditation, harmony, and detachment from overwhelming anxiety or curiosity.

Inner balance and imbalance

Most of the time we are not aware of our motivators any more than of our heart or lungs; they all affect us fairly smoothly. However, because of the different functions of each motivator, there are times when the influence of one motivator may be at cross-purposes with that of another, generating an inner sense of conflict. Emotional balance can be restored if the third motivator is not inordinately suppressed, can displace one of the other two, and, thereby, rotation among the three motivators gets re-established.

For instance, risk-taking, stimulated by Expressive, may cause Survival to bring on anxiety. Or excessive fear, stimulated by Survival, may prevent Expressive from stimulating someone to take a necessary chance. Quiescence may soothe an inner conflict between these two motivators, but may thus bring on more passivity than necessary.

Some personality differences are due to the frequent precedence of one motivator over the two others. For instance, preference for Survival will generate a cautious, conscientious temperament, but its exaggerated influence leads to compulsive over-anxiety. Preference for Expressive will generate someone with much creativity, or who is very sexual or risk-prone. If exaggerated he/she may court too much danger. Someone who prefers Quiescence is particularly peace-loving, likely to be spiritual and calm, but may become too abstracted.

If any one motivator takes on precedence too frequently, we are likely to feel unbalanced, or "out of sorts". However, if this does not happen excessively, we can maintain emotional balance and function effectively.

Our motivators play a part both in generating and supporting our scripts and in bringing on all kinds of reactions within us to promote our use of our genetic aptitudes and aspirations. I believe we are born with genetic preferences for a particular motivator. Early script stories often point to the motivator which most corresponds to the person's genetic tendencies. Some script stories may illustrate inner conflicts among motivators, or the repression of one by the two others.

Script recognition workshops

After recognizing how episcripts can be sometimes erroneously thought of as tragic scripts, I wanted to learn more about healthy scripts and how to benefit from recognizing one's script without assumptions of pathology. Admittedly, I hoped to convince Berne to re-examine some of his views on scripts.

Therefore, early in 1970, I conducted some workshops with reasonably happy, healthy volunteers who wondered whether they had predesigned some aspects of their lives. I designed what I

called "The Four Story Exercise", whereby participants wrote out brief snippets of stories that had impressed them at various developmental stages. These were compared with one another to see whether aspects of their childhood scripts were maintained unconsciously into adulthood.

This process illustrated that there were clear common denominators between early stories and recent ones. Often, presenters also compared symbolic meanings with episodes of their lives. Their reports indicated that they found the process very meaningful.

Berne died before the summer conference where I had planned to present these and other findings, so I almost dropped the project. However, coincidentally, I was invited to conduct some workshops in Europe with participants who did not want or need psychotherapy, so I conducted a few such workshops with them.

I did not anticipate doing more than a few of these workshops. However, the feedback about insights gained through this process was so encouraging that by now, more than thirty-two years later, I have conducted more than a hundred "script recognition workshops" in more than seven countries and six languages, with perhaps two thousand participants. I have also trained a sizeable number of professionals to do them responsibly.

I described my updated views on scripts and my "Four Story Exercise" in a chapter of a book edited by Graham Barnes, entitled *Transactional Analysis after Eric Berne* (English, 1977), and in a book published in Germany.

Of course, over the years, there have been changes in the format, taking into account the age of each presenter. However, we still ask participants to write out, in chronological order, in less than ten lines for each, snippets of stories or shows that impressed them at particular stages of life. These workshops were always clearly described in advance as specifically *not* for purposes of therapy. While some participants came after completing contractual psychotherapy, the majority came simply because they wanted a perspective about how their lives had progressed. Some were facing important life choices, and wanted more clarity about their goals. In rare instances, if issues came up that warranted therapy, they were identified, with referrals to other therapists.

Even after all these years, I am still amazed at how clearly

be recognized in recent stories, thus showing that aspects of the childhood script are maintained unconsciously throughout life. The adolescent story is often quite scary. Sometimes, it represents a revolt against the early script, sometimes to a re-evaluation of inhibiting or potentially harmful aspects of the script.

Most clients are very thoughtful after presenting their stories and hearing the structured contributions from group members about common denominators, stark contrasts, etc. (The workshop leader offers guidance to ensure that comments do not burden the presenter with inappropriate projections.) Since most such workshops take place over 3–4 days, presenters are encouraged to limit their initial verbal reactions and to continue later, usually the next day. Thus, they can soberly consider any new insights. From letters and from participants who returned for a second workshop, a beneficial effect of such a workshop may last long afterwards.

Illustration of a story sequence

Annette (pseudonym), a forty-year-old divorced journalist who attended a workshop in France last year, was willing to give me copies of her story snippets with permission to translate and use them anonymously. Here they are.

1. (before age 5)

La Belle au bois dormant (Sleeping Beauty).

A protected young princess eludes her care-takers and runs out of the castle to a hut she saw in the distance. Inside is an old woman, spinning. Belle tries the spindle, pricks her finger, and immediately falls into a hundred-year sleep before being awakened by a prince from far away.

2. (about age 5–6)

Les malheurs de Sophie, by the Contesse de Segur (Sophie's misfortunes).

This is a series about Sophie, a well-behaved girl, but with wild ideas. For instance, in one story, she sees a bucket with white liquid being used by workmen. She dips her naked foot in it and gets

badly burnt. Her rigid mother is always shocked by Sophie's antics and punishes her each time by sending her to bed without supper.

3. (About age 5–7)

How the Elephant Got His Trunk (From Rudyard Kipling).

Little elephant had "insurmountable curiosity". When he went too close to the crocodile to ask questions, the crocodile grabbed his nose to pull him down. Little elephant pulled away; finally the crocodile let go, but the little elephant's nose got sooooooo long and stayed that way for all future elephants.

4. (Adolescence)

"The Lady of Shalott" (Tennyson poem learned in language class)

She may only see the world through a mirror because of a curse. One day she sees Sir Lancelot in the mirror: "she left the web, she left the loom, / she made three paces through the room" to look out the window. Immediately the mirror cracks, "the curse is come upon me" she cries and runs out to a barge, on which she dies. The barge floats down the river. Sir Lancelot sees the dead lady and marvels at her beauty.

6. (Last year)

Scenes from French film: "The goofy old lady" (based on a short story by Brecht)

(a) After the funeral of her husband an elderly woman takes her cup of coffee to the terrace and looks at the view. She realizes she has not taken the time to do so in years.

(b) Later: She offers hospitality to a homeless young woman who is wrongly accused of being promiscuous and is being chased away from the village.

(c) Later: The two women enjoy choosing a second hand car to travel with.

(d) Much later: After the old woman's funeral the young woman leafs through a thick album with many joyous photos of the old lady in numerous settings and different landscapes.

After her stories were discussed, Annette indicated that she recognized that the Expressive motivator was dominant for her,

perhaps genetically. She felt proud that already, at age five, she had wanted to "run out of the castle" even though she was punished, like Sophie, the little elephant, and the Lady of Shalott. She was amazed at how well these stories corresponded to her life. Her parents had always tried to hold her back, she felt.

At adolescence she had realized she was overly "constricted", but had imagined freeing herself regardless of consequences. Fortunately, she had evolved, as illustrated by the fourth story. It still showed how she had felt limited, but then able to enjoy life to the end. She saw the hospitality offered by the older woman to the young woman who was being hounded for alleged sexual misconduct as representing her acceptance of her former self. In the past, she had accepted punishment for normal self-expression, but she no longer needed to do so.

She had needed a "Prince" to "awaken" her, she said, but "Belle" hadn't chosen him herself. No wonder her marriage had been unsatisfactory! Well, now she was fully out of 100 years' sleep, in a new relationship. She now felt confident that she could continue making choices that were right for her, even if her nose might become too long due to curiosity. That was why she was successful in her work as a journalist, she added; she was daring and enjoyed her work.

Comments and conclusions

I remain impressed by how children are motivated to translate their longings into colourful scripts and how human beings can find such imaginative ways to use these, consciously and unconsciously, to support the development of their lives.

In my workshops, I was privileged to see that participants could gain new insights, personal power, and renewed creativity from the relatively simple examination of their script stories in the company of others—even though these others were not necessarily brilliant or particularly loving.

At the end of each workshop, it always turned out that participants not only felt they benefited from the workshop, but, more importantly, they fully valued each other, said so, and meant it! This leaves me, also, appreciative of the opportunity to have written this

article and to thus recapture the awe and optimism that I feel whenever I consider the amazing human phenomenon of script formation.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Life scripts: an existential perspective

Birgitta Heiller and Charlotte Sills

Introduction

In *What Do You Say after You Say Hello?*, Eric Berne, the founder of transactional analysis, states that "The script is what the person planned to do in early childhood, and the life course is what actually happens. The life course is determined by genes, by parental background, and by external circumstances" (1972, p. 53).

A few pages later, Berne speaks of Daemon and Phusis:

> The forces of destiny are foursome and fearsome: demonic parental programming, abetted by the inner voice the ancients called the *Daemon*; constructive parental programming, aided by the thrust of life called *Phusis* long ago; external forces, still called Fate, and independent aspirations, for which the ancients have no human name, since for them such were the privileges mainly of gods and kings. [*ibid.*, p.56]

Thus, script is seen as the interplay of universal and personal circumstances.

Since Berne's writings, transactional analysis has often put an emphasis on the "script apparatus", which contains the first two