Diane. Her family has conveyed to her a fear of contagion. The resulting sense of exemption and immunity she finds unpretty. So as an adult, and an artist, she devotes herself to reversing the equation. Her pictures of transvestites, albino sword swallowers, Jewish giants, Russian midgets, twins, triplets, strippers, and masked retardates on Halloween emerge from immersion in contagion, identification with what as a child she felt exempt from. At seven she could not wander down, French nanny by her side; as an artist she finally makes the descent, lives inside the cavity for hours and days at a time, her camera a talisman and a license. She made certain she was no longer innocent or immune.

I regard this scene as prototypical because of the way in which it succeeds as an encapsulation of so many conflicts and motives met with in Arbus's life and art. It comprises a summary. Her absent (or present by way of conspicuous absence) parents, her sense of exemption and its implied alienation from the world, her wealth, her loneliness and sadness, her art's dedication to finding beauty in ugliness, to the documentation of a Dante-esque underworld most would never see if not for Arbus herself—all these facts the prototypical scene compresses into one supersalient happening. It isn't entirely quixotic to say that to know this one scene is to know Diane Arbus. As a configuration, its sweep really is enormously inclusive.

By Alexander's standards, Arbus's scene is salient, marked by qualities of uniqueness and primacy, for starters, but it's also prototypical—supersalient—because of the richness and range of information it condenses. This brings up an important point: All prototypical scenes are salient, but not all salient scenes rise to prototypical status. And this proposition, in turn, brings up a question: Which saliencies are prototypical, and why?

Some prototypical scenes can be identified through the use of pointers similar to those outlined by Alexander. After all, prototypical scenes may be unique, emphasized by their subjects, marked by isolation or incompleteness, and so on. Some, however, may not possess any of these characteristics, though by relying on other telltale cues, one still can know them when one sees them.

(1) Prototypical scenes generally are recalled vividly, with specificity and emotional intensity (see Table 3.2). As additional examples will show, colors usually are emphasized, characters are carefully positioned, dialogue with transcript-type detail occurs. Focus, in other words, is intense, surrounding scenes retreating into comparative deconcentration or dispersion (as in a photograph). Regarding emotional intensity, such scenes are never lukewarm. Though not necessarily dramatically conveyed, affective tone lends clear atmosphere to the proceeding. Arbus's scene, for example, is recalled ruefully, her deprivation (the outside world being sealed) and loneliness (no one present but paid governess) emphasized. It isn't, as she says, a "pretty" picture. Innocence bequeaths unreality.

(2) Prototypical scenes also interpenetrate. By this I mean something a little more precise than just repetition. Interpenetration implies permeation; the prototypical scene permeates. One finds it leaking into a number of different contexts or activities or personal products. Plath's scene (described shortly) appears in a poem, a novel, a journal entry, and a letter; Kathryn Harrison's prototypically prototypical scene (also described shortly) occurs in a book of fiction and in a memoir. So it isn't only that the subject tells others about the scene repetitively; more definingly, the scene works its way into a range of psychological or artistic settings, either overtly or allusively. This isn't the most felicitous of analogies, but in the sense of transmission from one location to another, one could say that prototypical scenes metastasize. They travel. It's as if, because of their importance and the attention they command, they remain chronically on the ready for retrieval, like a Broadway stand-in who might get called to duty any moment, with or without warning.

(3) Prototypical scenes also ordinarily issue from developmental crises in the nonpathological sense of "crisis" meant by Erikson (i.e., each psychosocial stage entails a "decisive encounter" between a person and a particular sort of conflict, e.g., the one between identity and role confusion). Arbus's scene may illustrate, for instance, the conflict between initiative and guilt —she wants to explore, to inspect the darkness,

Table 3.2 W.T. Schultz's keys to identifying "prototypical scenes"

1. *Vividness, specificity, emotional intensity*	Such scenes are never "lukewarm" emotionally. Focus is intense, color emphasized, dialogue recounted with precision, characters carefully positioned.
2. *Interpenetration*	Such scenes permeate or leak into a number of different contexts or activities or creative products (stories, poems, novels, memoir).
3. *Developmental crisis*	Such scenes entail a "decisive encounter" between a person and a particular sort of conflict, for instance identity vs. role confusion or initiative vs. guilt.
4. *Family conflict*	Such scenes more specifically focus in on conflict within the family, between, say, a daughter and father or two brothers or a son and mother.
5. *Thrownness*	Such scenes place the subject in a situation that violates the status-quo. Something anomalous or surprising transpires, producing a feeling of disequilibrium. The normally taken-for-granted suddenly can't be; old ways of making sense do not suffice. Repetitive story-telling thus allows one to extract meaning from the event, to decrease its unfamiliarity, the anxiety it provokes.

to see a world that has been concealed from her, but to do so would risk contagion and the contempt of her parents, who forbid her such contact, and of her surrogate parent, Mamselle. Her instincts and native curiosity Arbus is asked to override. The implicit moral is that the two worlds—rich and poor, light and dark, above and below ground—must never merge. Initiative Erikson equates with a posture of being "on the make"; this perfectly captures Arbus's later attitude as she sought out photos that, in order to get them, required the utmost tolerance for risk and capacity for daring.

(4) Prototypical scenes most often depict family conflict, directly or indirectly. Arbus's isn't the best example in this case, though I do think conflict lingers slightly off-stage in the scene she recollects. Arbus's parents delegated her care to paid others, many of whom Arbus detested. She was raised by women she did not like because her mother (and father) hadn't the time or the desire to do the job themselves. Arbus doubtless recognized this as a form of abandonment, and I'm sure there were occasions when that recognition angered or depressed her, or both. So the conflict the scene expresses, allusively, is between a child who wants to be loved and encouraged, her intuitions and desires taken seriously if not indulged, and a pair of parents who either, in the father's case, have little time for their kids or, like the mother, find them perplexing and faintly embarrassing on account of their originality. Another conflict regards wealth. Money made Arbus guilty. "I've always been ashamed of making money," she tells Terkel, "and when I do make money from a photograph, I immediately assume it's not as good a photograph" (quoted in Bosworth, 1995, p. 279). The shanty town was a reminder of her privilege, her family's wealth and its associated costs, most of which she resented. "You see, I never suffered from adversity. . . . I was confirmed in a sense of unreality" (p. 279). Arbus's desire was to break free. She sought what might be thought of as the reality of adversity. It became, for her, an antidote to the unreality of walled wealth.

There is a photo by Arbus I find strangely haunting, and in certain respects it evokes her prototypical scene. It's called "a flower girl at a wedding, Conn. 1964" (Arbus, 1972). The girl appears to be around seven or so—roughly Arbus's age when she visited the Central Park reservoir cavity. She wears a flower tiara and what looks like a white fur jacket. She holds a wicker basket. Her eyes are dazed; she stares absently, abstractly beyond the photographer, not so much at her. We wonder, what is she thinking? Thin arms of nearby bushes reach out at her from the left and from below. And the background, her mind's metaphorical content, is fog shrouded, crepuscular, dotted with indistinct pines or cedars. The girl's glowing getup contrasts with the world outside. She is white, bright, carefully assembled; it (the world) is growing darker and more menacing by the second, the fog seemingly advancing toward her feet, intent on enveloping her. This, I think, is Arbus. To all appearances she looks to be the perfect picture of a lucky girl, pretty and rich, but in her eyes we see the darkness. It's touched her, and she will disappear into it.

(5) Finally, in all the examples provided below, prototypical scenes creatively rehearse varying degrees of thrownness. What I mean is, the subject recalling the scene finds him- or herself in a situation that violates the status quo, in which something anomalous or surprising transpires. The feeling is of disequilibrium; the normally taken-for-granted suddenly can't be; old ways of making sense of things do not suffice. Just like in Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolution, where anomalies provide the stimulus for developments of theory, in the individual, too, events that are initially un-understandable call for more conscious efforts at narration. Repetitive storytelling is one way to extract meaning from the event and to decrease its unfamiliarity, the anxiety it provokes. Kerouac gets slapped by his beloved and otherwise saintly brother Gerard (see below). How could Gerard have done such a thing? What does the slap say about him? About little Jack? How to assimilate the slap into previously existing mental frames for who Gerard is and what he stands for?

The model prototypical scene will possess these five features: (1) specificity and emotional intensity, (2) interpenetration, (3) developmental gravity, (4) family conflict, and (5) thrownness, or violation of the normally taken for granted. Not every such scene contains every single element. Judgment calls sometimes need to be made. Psychobiography, after all, is more art than science. But if these scenes can be tracked down and worked with, mined for meaning, they stand a good chance of either generating psychobiographical hypotheses (they may reveal what we don't yet know) or confirming pre-existing interpretations (they may underscore what we already felt to be true). At this chapter's conclusion I discuss similar concepts contained in the literature and why and how the prototypical scene is unique among them and also explore a number of theoretical/methodological questions the idea may raise. But first, more examples are in order, as a way of fleshing the concept out more fully. I begin with the Southern writer Truman Capote, most famous for his nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* (and also for being famous), then turn to Kathryn Harrison, Jack Kerouac, and Sylvia Plath. Other examples of the use of prototypical scenes can be found in this volume (see, e.g., Ogilvie, chap. 12, and Barenbaum, chap. 16).

Truman Capote

The writer John Knowles, Capote's neighbor and famous in his own right for the classic novel *A Separate Peace* (2003) says,

> Truman often talked about himself. Oh, my God, yes. . . . Just after I first met him, Truman began telling me his life story. This terrible, tragic story. The central tragedy (as he saw it) in his life is a scene: Truman is two years old. He wakes up in an utterly strange room, empty. He yells, but he's locked in there. He's petrified, doesn't know where he is—which is in some dumpy hotel in the Deep South—and his parents have gone out to get drunk and dance; they have locked this tiny little boy in this room. That was his image of terror, and I think it was his way of symbolizing the insecurity of his youth—this image of that kind of abandonment. (quoted in Plimpton, 1997, p. 26)

Then here is Capote himself, from a conversation with Lawrence Grobel:

> It was a certain period in my life. I was only about two years old, but I was very aware of being locked in this hotel room. My mother was a very young girl. We were living in this hotel room in New Orleans. She had no one to leave me with. She had no money and she had nothing to do with my father. She would leave me locked in this hotel room when she went out in the evening with her beaus and I would become hysterical because I couldn't get out of this room. (quoted in Grobel, 1985, p. 48)

Knowles is right on: The hotel room scene symbolizes the insecurity of Capote's youth—and his adulthood. It was, indeed, his image of terror and abandonment. It also, like all prototypical scenes, compresses the core parameters of Capote's life story into one determining constellation. It's a chorus of voices converging on a single note.

Figure 3.1. A fresh-faced Truman Capote in Venice, circa 1950. (Getty Images)

Capote has always been clear on the fact that "there was a great absence of love" in his childhood (see Schultz, 2001). His mother was pregnant at seventeen and later became alcoholic and committed suicide; his father he seldom saw at all. He was raised by his mother's family, a not utterly unhappy circumstance inspiring much of his early, more "fantastic" writing, like his first novel "Other Voices, Other Rooms" (1948)."I always thought of myself as a kind of two-headed calf. . . . I was an only child, very sensitive and intelligent, with no sense of being particularly wanted by anybody. . . . My mother wasn't unkind to me; she simply had other interests. . . . I wasn't neglected financially. . . . It was just a total emotional neglect. I never felt I belonged anywhere" (Inge, 1987, p. 117). In interview after interview—and Capote sat for hundreds—he never wavers when asked, as he often was, about his greatest fear or most frightening experience: "betrayals, abandonments" (p. 354).

> The only way people can ever hurt me is if I let them get too close to me. . . . I do think rejection is the unkindest thing people do, and maybe it stems from my childhood when I was shoo'ed from one family to another for different reasons. . . . It's a very powerful trauma, rejection, or to be the recipient of any kind of deliberate cruelty. . . . [Reading some] bad review of something, that doesn't bother me at all. But if I feel somebody has betrayed me in some way or been disloyal about something, I get terribly upset about it. (pp. 316, 306, 178)

Then in remarks bearing directly on the point: "Because of my childhood, because I always had the sense of being abandoned, certain things have fantastic effects on me, beyond what someone else might feel. . . . Every morning I wake up and in about two minutes I'm weeping. . . . I'm so unhappy. I just have to come to terms with something. There is something wrong. I don't know what it is" (quoted in Clarke, 1988, p. 498).

There isn't time to explore this vein as deeply as it warrants, but themes of abandonment showed up in Capote's fiction too. There was, in other words, clear interpenetration of content and symbolism. One of his first stories, and still his most famous, was called "Miriam." It's an eerie tale of a mysteriously motherless little white-haired girl resembling, in numerous incidentals, a female version of Truman (who was often mistaken for a girl anyway, or dressed up as a girl by his aunts). Miriam manages to insinuate herself into, then promptly destroy, the life of a widow, Mrs. H.T. Miller. At the story's enigmatic finish, Mrs. Miller appears on the brink of madness, the girl's Myrmidon, pathetically powerless to say "no." What does it all mean? That Capote's used his gift to turn the tables. Instead of the forgotten and forgettable two-year-old at the mercy of his mother's narcissistic needs, he is the utterly indomitable Miriam, reducing the widow to a jabbering parody of the victimized "senior." The story is an act of revenge. No one's going to lock Miriam in a room.

Capote's last book, the one he famously failed to finish and that many felt never even existed, was *Answered Prayers*, published in 1988 in the form of fragments assembled from magazine excerpts. The book's narrator is P.B. Jones. Jones is a genius, about as tall as a shotgun—just like

Capote—and is, funnily enough, shopping a book called *Answered Prayers*. He also, like Capote did, comes to know many of society's elite, and over time they tell him their secrets—stories that with Jones's finessing make up the bulk of the book. It is episodic and anecdotal in the extreme (but nearly always wickedly amusing).

Capote bequeaths to Jones his childhood: "I was a baby abandoned in the balcony of a St. Louis vaudeville theater" (1988, p. 4). Raised by nuns—nonsecular versions of Capote's aunts—Jones grew to be a "favorite," though "they never realized how conniving I was." For example, Jones says "when I left the orphanage, ran away, I didn't leave a note or ever communicate ... again; a typical example of my numbed, opportunistic nature" (p. 5). He ventures a similar self-analysis later:

> I didn't say good-bye to anybody, just left; I'm the type, and a type by no means rare, who might be your closest friend, a buddy you talked to every day, yet if one day you neglected to make contact, if you failed to telephone me, then that would be it, we'd never speak again, for I would never telephone you. I've known lizard bloods like that and never understood them, even though I was one myself. (p. 30)

In both these pre-emptive abandonments, Jones leaves an older woman whom he actually likes: in the first instance Sister Martha, who taught English and was convinced of Jones's gift, in the second Alice Lee Langman, a writer who befriends Jones, even allowing him to live with her. Jones's creed in fact duplicates Capote's in life: preclude potential betrayals and abandonments by betraying and abandoning prophylactically. That's what the real *Answered Prayers* was for Capote. By tattling on all the trillionaires who considered him their pocket Merlin, and the "swans," as he called them, who cherished their witty gay confidante, Capote chose self-destruction over destruction. When book excerpts appeared, Capote got dropped like a hot potato. He claimed he didn't care, but his drinking and drug use increased, as did his level of depression. In short order he was a mess. He fried the fancier fish, but he got swallowed by a whale.

Capote made use of a single scene to suggest the isolation of his childhood. In his life he feared more than anything else betrayal and abandonment—a repeat, in other words, of the hotel lockup. His fiction, especially early on, was written "to escape from the realities of my own troubled life, which wasn't easy. My underlying motivation was a quest for some sense of serenity, some particular kind of affection that I needed and wanted. . . . I never felt I belonged anywhere" (quoted in Grobel, 1985, p. 46). The prototypical scene runs through the work in the form of call and response; the work was a reply to anticipatory panic. Capote was in a position to use his writing defensively, to "escape," to allay his greatest fear, as in "Miriam" and *Answered Prayers*.

All the indicators are present in this scene: specificity and emotional intensity, interpenetration, developmental gravity, family conflict, and thrownness, or violation of the normally taken for granted (in the sense that a child typically may take for granted that he will not be locked in a room by himself for long periods of time, and by his own mother, no less!). Something else to notice, and it's a feature of prototypical scenes generally: As memory is a construction and in some cases a fabrication, remembered prototypical scenes are part fact, part fantasy. Most often they likely contain whispers of truth, or even howls, but they are also, to varying degrees, imaginative products. We embellish as necessary. We add or subtract, focus or blur, amplify or mute. At the same time, it's important to realize that some such scenes will be utterly veridical, scarcely imagined at all; others will be utterly fanciful, scarcely valid at all. It makes no difference, though, as far as the scene's importance and/or function, which is to summarize, constellate, and express (parsimoniously) life themes. In conveying this concept, I sometimes hear from students, "But who knows if it really happened at all? Capote was two, for heaven's sake! How could he possibly remember an event like that one? In fact, isn't it the case that narrative memory doesn't really kick in till around three or four???!!!" Good points, every one. But reality or dream, to Capote the hotel scene said it all. It was his magnum opus. If it never even happened, he still made use of it whenever he needed

a quick reminder of who he was. And thus, it also tells us who he was.

Kathryn Harrison

Harrison's prototypical scene was the first I ever came across. In other words, it was the inspiration for the idea, along with a few other scenes that followed in quick succession. I think its centrality in the story of her life is indisputable. It condenses so much, and therefore says so much—an entire life writ small. On the other hand, it also raises questions, the most interesting of which Harrison herself asked me after reading a draft of an earlier chapter. I'll get to her demurral shortly. First, the scene itself. Harrison includes it in her autobiographical novel *Thicker Than Water* (1991; her first book) and in her memoir about her affair with her father, *The Kiss* (1997). In *Thicker Than Water* the incident seems deliberately bookmarked by memories of sex. Harrison speaks of "being fucked" for the first time, and thinking of her mother, of the "whole brilliant unknown territory of sex traversed in somnambulence." She says she "drove men to violence so that perhaps they could awaken me" (p. 178). Then the scene appears.

> [My mother] drove us to the gynecologist's gray-walled office on the fifteenth floor of a skyscraper in West Los Angeles. Through the tinted windows and the summer smog, the city below looked cool and elusive, half-hidden under a blue shroud. Toward the ocean, where the pall lifted, I could see traffic crawling on the tiny distant freeway. My mother was in the examining room when the doctor broke my hymen so he could fit me properly for the device. He used a series of graduated green plastic phalli. First a tiny, little boy-sized one, then larger and larger ones, until he withdrew one whose shaft had been discolored by a smear of blood. My mother leaned against the wall, watching. She stood just to the left of a poster that revealed the most intimate, cellular level of human communion, one triumphant sperm breaking through the egg's thin, eager wall. I writhed on the table as the doctor swabbed my genitals with disinfectant. Then, after producing the correct size of diaphragm and instructing me on its insertion, the doctor left the room, taking my mother with him, so that I might climb painfully down from the table and try to put it in correctly by myself. . . . It sprang out of my grasp, skidding along the floor, twice before I got it in. . . . But I didn't use it. I thought of it as hers. She was the one who had wanted it. (pp. 179–180)

Harrison follows this with more about her (or, to be more precise, her character's) sexual history, recalling "all the boys who fucked me, some reaching for me with love on their faces, some with anger, one disgustedly." She says she continued to think of her mother every time and of "the constant message of my childhood. Do not make the mistakes your mother did. Do not get involved with the Wrong Boy" (p. 180).

As noted, the scene also finds its way into *The Kiss* (1998), which appeared roughly six years later. There Harrison repeats, in exactly the same words, her childhood's "constant message": "Don't make the mistakes your mother did" (p. 41). *The Kiss*'s gynecologist seems reluctant to use the green plastic penises, of a color that "exists nowhere in nature." He asks Harrison's mother if she's sure. Is this what she (mother) really wants done? Yes, mother replies. Harrison reaches the foregone conclusion, "This doctor deflowers me in front of my mother" (p. 43). The very next scene finds Harrison talking to her father on the phone, preparatory to his visit—a visit culminating in a highly sexual kiss at the airport that commences the affair.

A few other details drawn from the memoir refer back to the gynecologist scene. First, Harrison expresses shock at discovering her father's uncircumcised penis, which she "can't help but find alien, unclean"—just like the alien-appearing green phalli. Second, she connects a later suicide attempt to the gynecologist visit, saying "I think I took [the pills] so that my body would die along with what else was murdered that day—girlhood, hope, any notion of being safe anywhere, with anyone" (p. 186). Third, in the kiss's wake Harrison tries registering for college, her roommates fluttering excitedly around her, but finds she can "do none of what I, as

a student, am supposed to do" (p. 72). She spends the better part of two weeks, days and nights as well, sleeping upright, her arms encircling her knees—all the while in a "green vinyl-upholstered chair," its back to the wall (p. 72). The green here may sound incidental. On the other hand, judging by the way Harrison emphasizes the detail of the chair and its greenness—describing it five times over a short four pages—and because of what the chair is intended to symbolize—passivity, alienation, shock—my guess is that it's anything but.

In the gynecologist visit we meet with all the earmarks of prototypicality. The scene's recalled with harrowing specificity—the gray-walled office on the fifteenth floor, the blue shroud of the hidden city below, the green phalli, the poster on the wall, the realization in the deflowering's wake, "Do not make the mistakes your mother did, do not get involved with the Wrong Boy." It interpenetrates, appearing in two books six years apart, and spreading associatively over similarly stigmatized happenings (like the suicide attempt). Family conflict is at the scene's core—the diaphragm is not something Harrison wanted—and the scene's also developmentally decisive, occurring when Harrison was fifteen and just becoming sexually active. Her mother drove her to the doctor's office, her mother said "yes" when the doctor wavered, her mother stood by as the procedure unfolded—so the scene also conveys a strong attitude of thrownness. The deflowering is something that was done to Harrison. She didn't even use the diaphragm. She thought of it as her mother's. Against her will and her own wishes she was violated.

This one scene really says it all, or if it doesn't quite say it all, it sure says a lot. We get the culpable mother. Though Harrison's passivity and desire (as a fifteen-year-old) to please surely abetted things, the diaphragm was her mother's doing. She made it happen, not Harrison. And several years later, she also made the incest happen. By virtue of inaction, she provides the context for the "kiss." Mother can't take father to the airport because she has a headache (the single most stereotypical reason, one might add, for declining sex). "You drive him," she tells Harrison. "He seems more interested in your company than in mine" (p. 66). "Oh good," Harrison's father says when he learns of the change of plans. Then at the gate he sticks his tongue in his daughter's mouth.

We get symbolic descent into utterly unnatural "sex," with her father's uncircumsized, "alien" and "unclean" penis later recalling the green phalli. We get the violating doctor who asks the mother's permission. Harrison's father was also a doctor—a Ph.D.—and he was also given tacit permission. We get the "Wrong Boy." Harrison does in fact commit her mother's mistake. She has sex with the supremely "Wrong Boy"—her own father. We get the somnambulance of sex itself and also its wrongness, its violence, its secretiveness. We get the murder of hope, the danger of being anywhere, with anyone—even one's mother, father.

Prototypical scenes summarize lives and life conflicts; they are shorthand for a much longer "text," the life story. Harrison's truly is a stellar example.

But it's also interestingly problematical. Thinking I was really on to something, and thrilled by the chance for once to share my work with its subject (all my prior subjects were dead!), I sent Harrison an earlier chapter on the prototypical scene that appeared in 2002 (see Schultz, 2003). She was amazingly gracious. "I'm never opposed to opportunities for self-awareness," she said. We struck up a correspondence. What she said about the gynecologist visit, and my assertion regarding its centrality, was characteristically incisive: "In some essential way I'm living a second life, and you're responding to the first one. . . . Intentionally I destroyed the unhappy young woman I was, used my father as he used me, accomplices in the psychic murder of that unfortunate girl in the gynecologist's office" (K. Harrison, personal communication, December 13, 2001). What Harrison's asking, and it's a question one can't possibly avoid, is whether one scene is enough for every life. Can we outgrow a prototypical scene? Does each life transition require its own prototype event? And more peripherally, can one really, whether intentionally or not, destroy prior versions of oneself, rendering the prototypical scenes encapsulating those prior versions more or less insignificant? I have to say, I don't know the answers to these questions. I'm inclined to believe that for most

lives, one scene is enough, for the reason that most lives seem to lack the sort of radical disjuncture or discontinuity referred to by Harrison. Most of us do not live second, third, fourth lives. Most of us, moreover, do not murder prior versions of who we were, either. We bring them along with us, like by-products or impurities. And I'm not so sure Harrison's psychic murder succeeded. After all, as I discussed above, the "tongue" still trails her.

One final observation before moving on to the next scene: My conversations with Kathryn Harrison have never been anything but rewarding. But in general, living psychobiographical subjects are not always preferable to dead ones. Their willingness to answer questions or respond to ideas pro or con does not lead ineluctably to enhanced validity, as many seem to believe. Most people do not know themselves very well. Their motives may be as obscure to them as they are to us—even obscurer. They may be defensive. They may want to be thought of in ways that conflict with who they really are. They may even lie. Dead or alive, people are complicated. Dead or alive, we still read them the same way. We still work with text—what people say and write.

Jack Kerouac

The name Kerouac calls to mind the image of a carefree hipster romantic wandering the highways of the East and West, stopping now and then to guzzle Tokay and scribble pithy haiku, thumb pointing permanently north, lips curved into a permanently beatific grin. Nothing could be further from the truth. Loss was Kerouac's stimulus; the atmosphere he breathed was gloom, a word appearing in his work maybe more than any other. Mnemosyne was his muse, and what he strove always to remember, to conjure, and when unsuccessful in those two tasks, to replace, was the vision of his dead brother Gerard, who passed away when Kerouac was four (Gerard was nine). By all accounts Gerard was a saint. Nuns tended his bedside in order that they might hear from him Christlike parabolic sighs of wisdom. Birds flew to his hand fearlessly. He nursed trapped mice. He saw visions of angels. To Kerouac he was Buddha, Christ, and brother—ideal self, too—rolled up into one utterly unearthly introject.

Not surprisingly, Kerouac's prototypical scene centers on Gerard. But it isn't a paean to Gerard's saintliness. It's more a dirge, a song of lament. And it's definitely a violation, maybe even wished for, of the hallowed family script. It appears in the book devoted to Gerard, *Visions of Gerard* (1991): Gerard instructs Jack,

> Always be careful not to hurt anyone—never get mad if you can help it—I gave you a slap in the face the other day but I didn't know it when I did it"—
>
> (That'd been one of the last days when he felt good enough to get up and play with his erector set, a gray exciting morning for all-day work, gladly he'd at the breakfast crumb-swept newspapers of the table begun to raise his first important girder when I importunately rushed up tho gleefully to join in the watching but knocked the whole thing over scattering screws and bolts all over and upsetting the delicate traps, inadvertently and with that eternal perdurable mistakenness we all know, he slapped my face yelling "Decolle donc!" (Get away!) and must have instantly regretted it, no doubt that in a few minutes his remorse was greater than my disappointed regret—). (p. 104)

They make up "at the sad and final mortal window," Jack and "holy Gerard." Do you forgive me for hitting you? Gerard asks. Yes, says Jack, "tho I was too littly naive to know what it meant forgive, and hadn't really forgiven him, holding back that reserve of selfly splendor for future pomp" (p. 105).

Even before *Visions of Gerard*, in a letter to Neal Cassady that Kerouac calls a "full confession of my life," the scene surfaces. Gerard is the letter's primary focus. Kerouac refers to his death as, oddly, "the agonized cock of the matter." He then says, "Neal, the death of this child was a loss that must be impossible for you and I to calculate in the souls of my mother and father" (Kerouac, 1995, p. 253). Here is the scene:

> Just before he died he slapped me in the face. It was the last thing I remember before he

died. It was a gray morning, my sister was going to school, breakfast was being removed from the table. Gerard sat at his erector set before the most magnificent structure of his brief career: it was huge, towering, a crane of some sort, arranged and hung in strange new ways and calculated to do a thousand strange feats. . . . But I had to come along and grab at his little arrangements: knock a subsidiary structure down, push the little wrench on the floor, whatever it was, disturbing him so suddenly that with understandable rage he impulsively tightened inside and his hand shot out and slapped me in the face. "Get away from here!" he cried. I mooned over that in the parlor. . . . I don't know what happened from there. Bill Burroughs claims according to his amateur psychoanalysis of me in 1945 that I resented the slap in the face and wished Gerard would die, and he died a few days later. (p. 259)

I couldn't agree with Burroughs more.

It's interesting to compare the two versions. The color gray recurs, as does Gerard's "get away [from here]." The erector set structure differs slightly: in the scene as recalled in 1950 (in the Cassady letter) it is huge, towering, with a phallic crane, whereas in *Visions of Gerard* we hear only about the raising of the first important girder (girders are horizontal support beams, so in fact they would not get raised at all). In 1950 Kerouac grabs at Gerard's arrangements—destroys them deliberately, in other words. In *Visions of Gerard* Kerouac rushes up to watch, and accidentally knocks the contraption over. The later version thus increases Gerard's guilt: what Jack did was inadvertent, the slap more unjustified than if Jack had knocked the structure over on purpose (as he does in the initial iteration of the scene).

But back to Burroughs's amateur psychoanalysis: The slap is the last thing Jack recalls about his brother (uniqueness). In the letter and in *Visions of Gerard* it is followed directly by Gerard's death, which four-year-old Jack eagerly and excitedly announces to his father and the entire neighborhood, "Gerard is dead! Gerard is dead!," as though spreading gospel. Proximity suggests causality. Gerard slaps Jack, Jack wishes silently, unconsciously, that Gerard would die, and Gerard does precisely that. Gerard's lasting gift is guilt. Jack's anger killed him. Also, Jack betrayed him by living. It was he who should have died, not Gerard. Anyone but Gerard! Since the slap precedes by a day or two Gerard's death, its effects are irreversible. No wonder, then, that Gerard becomes a haunter: "Why did I secretly believe he hated me after all?" Kerouac asks. "He who had been my kind brother had also been my hater in the night; . . . failing to destroy me, . . . he had no other recourse but to haunt me in the night. I feel that to him, I was the knower of his death" (1995, p. 272). Then later,

> Judas is me, Jesus is Gerard. What have I gone and done; and what hath God wrought? I never asked to be Judas and I'm sure that Judas never did. . . . But if I hadn't been born then how could I have betrayed Gerard; for I betrayed him merely by living when he died. He was an angel, I was a mortal; what he could have brought to the world, I destroyed by my mere presence; because if I had not lived, Gerard would have lived. (p. 282)

The only way for Jack to atone was by writing; the only reason he ever wrote at all, he tells

Figure 3.2. Jack Kerouac listening to himself on the radio, 1959. (Copyright John Cohen/ courtesy Deborah Bell Photographs, New York City)

us in *Visions of Gerard*, was for Gerard—"write in honor of his death." And Gerard appears constantly. In Kerouac's first book, *The Town and the City* (1983), he is Julian; he is also Dr. Sax, the shadow-haunter standing wild-haired over Kerouac's crib, as well as the "Shrouded Traveler" of *On the Road* (1991), pursuing Kerouac across the desert; he is Neal Cassady too, for as Kerouac repeats at least six times in two or three pages of *Visions of Cody* (about Cassady), "Cody is the brother I lost" (see Kerouac, 1972, pp. 318–321). In fact, Cassady, Gary Snyder (Japhy Ryder in *The Dharma Bums*, 1991), and countless other heroes Kerouac lists in his oeuvre with religious devotion—all can be seen as Gerard substitutes. Jack is even Gerard. The two look very much alike, as Jack explains at one point; and as Jack relates when preparing to start *Visions of Gerard*, "my brother is my true self as Bodhisattva Hero—the mournful idealistic little boy in the gloomy rain" (Kerouac, 1999, p. 367).

Like Zen masters will do, Gerard slapped Jack awake. From that moment Jack's noble suffering began. And he's "going to be made to appreciate it, like a Fallen Angel"—Samsara's "sorrow parade."

Sylvia Plath

Plath's father, Otto, the expert on bees and the inspiration for a series of poems known by critics as the "bee sequence," died roughly one week after Sylvia turned eight. On that day Plath "went into the dirt," she tells us, "into the lightless hibernaculum" where she wintered for twenty years (see the poem "Electra on Azalea Path"). She spent her artistic life knocking "for pardon" at her dead father's "gate." Like Kerouac did vis-à-vis Gerard, she felt her love killed her father. "It was my love did us both to death," she wrote (Plath, 1981). In dreams of deformity and death she records in her journal, she is (she conjectures) punished for this "murder," an act she repeats symbolically in what some consider the *Guernica* of modern poetry, "Daddy."

All this being so, it makes fine sense that Plath's prototypical scene centers on her dad—on, specifically, a visit to his grave. The event is recorded in her journal, is included in her novel *The Bell Jar* (1981a), and provides the stimulus for the poem "Electra on Azalea Path." There is interpenetration, in other words. The visit occurs on March 9, 1959, in the wake of what Plath describes as a "lugubrious" session with her therapist that left her "much freed":

> A clear blue day in Winthrop. Went to my father's grave—a very depressing sight. Three graveyards separated by streets, all made within the last fifty years or so, ugly crude block stones, headstones together, as if the dead were sleeping head to head in a poorhouse. In the third yard, on a flat grassy area looking across a sallow barren stretch to rows of wooden tenements, I found the flat stone, "Otto E. Plath: 1885–1940," right beside the path, where it would be walked over. Felt cheated. My temptation to dig him up. To prove he existed and really was dead. How far gone would he be? . . . Left shortly. It is good to have the place in mind. (Plath, 1993, p. 298)

Roughly ten days later she refers to facing "dark and terrible things" in therapy. She mentions fantasies of "killing and castrating" her father. "How to lay them?" she asks, "to stop them operating through the rest of my life? I have a vision of the poems I would write, but do not. When will they come?" (p. 299).

In "Electra on Azalea Path" she refers to the graveyard visit as the day she "woke" from her wintering. Before then, before she proved to herself that Otto really was dead, she had lain "small as a doll in my dress of innocence/ . . . dreaming your epic, image by image/ Nobody died or withered on that stage" (1981, p. 116).

The Bell Jar's trip to find her father's grave is prefaced by the interestingly ambiguous declaration, "I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave" (Plath, 1981a, p. 135). When she locates the stone she remembers she "had never cried for [my] father's death." She lays her face to the marble, howls her loss "into the cold salt rain." The next sentence is this: "I knew just how to go about it"—"it" meaning suicide.

The visit Plath finds depressing; she feels cheated. The flat stone is located in such a way as to encourage "walking over." In the numer-

ous poems about her father Plath describes him as "hieratical," "maestro"-like, as a "fixed vortex" on the air, straddling oceans, "riveting stones, air, all of it, together." He is, in "Daddy," marble-heavy, a "bag full of God." The list of father metaphors goes on and on. The point is, Plath's fearsome daddy introject had little in common with the flat marker looking across to rows of wooden tenements. If it was good to have that realization in mind—the fact that, as her mom averred, her father had died "like any man"—this may have had mostly to do with bringing the myth down to earth, taming the "man in black" imago. Indeed, Plath does speak of "paying her father back for the years of neglect"—for, in other words, dying on her and not playing any role in her life, in effect abandoning her (and the death was unnecessary, to make matters worse; for more on that, see Schultz, chap. 11 this vol.). She imagines killing her father and does just that in the poems, especially "Daddy."

I address this possibility more fully in chapter 11 on Plath, but one way to stop these fantasies from "operating through the rest of [her] life" was by allowing them entry into consciousness through the medium of the art. When Plath writes "Daddy, I have had to kill you," she refers primarily to the introject she tries hating into valuelessness. The other option might be to die to get back to her father—a tack she tried, and also wrote about ("at twenty I tried to die, and get back, back, back to you"). In *The Bell Jar* the visit leads directly to a suicide attempt. Again, proximity suggests causality. She finds her father, and then she resolves to die. She needs to know he's really dead. She can't live without this knowledge. But she has to die to get it.

Figure 3.3. Sylvia Plath (Corbis).

Plath's mourning at her dead father's grave is her prototypical scene. It's also a fair description of the chief motive for her poetry.

Conceptual Questions: Brief Replies

The prototypical scenes described and analyzed above do a decent job of illustrating the concept's value for psychobiography. They also nominate a number of questions, particularly as regards the idea's generalizability.

First, can we really propose that each life has one and only one prototypical scene? I raised this question before in the case of Kathryn Harrison. My provisional answer? Yes. The idea is that these scenes serve as quick and effective summaries of self. They pack a wonder of information into one small identity suitcase. And with each creative rehearsal, each retelling, they become even more privileged, more representative, more easily accessed. Springing so readily to mind, and doing their job so well, these scenes—partly because they constitute a violation that must be made sense of—never stop asserting themselves. If we find their pull difficult to resist, we do so nostalgically, with gratitude. They remind us, and others, who we are and where we came from. In rare cases of sudden identity explosion and rebirth via, for instance, conversion, epiphany, trauma, or even psychotherapy, one might choose to pack the scene away like an old family album. It doesn't do the trick anymore, one figures. It's the old "me," the "me" I left behind. (This was more or less Harrison's position.) But the question is, Has the scene truly become less prototypical? How replaceable is it? Embedded in this is a larger question: Can the new self

destructively update the old? Are some discontinuities more apparent than real? I worried this thorny question in an earlier chapter on Oscar Wilde, who made out of his prison experience an opportunity for self-revelation (Schultz, 2001). A new Wilde was heralded. Yet how new was he? And where did the old Wilde go? I'm not sure. It may be that stories change, but prototypical scenes remain the same. (Harrison committed psychic murder, but the tongue slavered on.)

Another question: What motivates the cultivation of prototypical scenes? Whence the drive to construct just one? It is in the nature of self to proliferate. Personality is a sort of oil spill. Like Jung said, the energy finds its gradients. Helpless theorists of who we are, we tend toward eclecticism. But eclecticism always breaks down in the face of its own illogic. Dissonance is its inevitable end result. And dissonance's remedy is consonance (it's hard to live cacophonously). The best theories are parsimonious. They possess the elegance of simplicity. The same goes for the best theories of self. After all, one can suffer from too much narration. More story is not always beneficial. It leads to confusion, dislocation, alienation, even delusion (i.e., imposing meaning on meaninglessness). The prototypical scene is the principle of parsimony in action. It is grounding. It unifies themes, like a collage. It brings pieces together. From time to time we need simple reminders, more signal and less static. That's precisely what the prototypical scene provides. It's a dissonance-decreasing distillation. It fashions a unity out of diversity. At times in the life cycle, especially early on, the ideal personal myth benefits from qualities of openness and differentiation. Premature foreclosure, the cutting off of identity options, will not do, particularly for adolescents. But as McAdams (1993) explains, early adulthood demands refinement, integration, reconciliation, coherence (pp. 271–273). One refashions the life story "in a way that brings the different characters together in some manner, or in a way that makes their oppositions even starker, so as to find unity and purpose" (p. 272). Excessive openness of story equals incoherence.

A final question centers on trauma: Is there such a thing as a happy prototypical scene? I want to say yes. But the proviso is "thrownness." No thrownness, no prototypical scene. Because these scenes depict a violation of the status quo—a contrast, an affront, a confrontation with a recalcitrant reality—they perplex, focus, and captivate attention. They become, in a word that works very nicely, riveting. And as such, they nominate themselves for prototypicality. We habituate to and overlook the familiar. It's just more of the same. Novelty transfixes, and it also tends to raise anxiety levels by virtue of its unexampledness. Turbulence is at the heart of prototypical scenes. But turbulence need not always be unhappy (unless one happens to be sitting on a plane). What it can't be, in this case, is bland. The affect is what the scene amplifies (as script theorist Silvan Tomkins might say). So again, affective intensity and thrownness are key. From these one might derive happiness or sadness; one might rise above or sink down; one might grow or get stuck. Arbus's life, for instance, was a sort of triumph over the privation of privilege that her scene underlines. She reversed the formula. Unfortunately, after going down, she couldn't get back up (see chap. 8, this volume).

Other Cues That Point to Pay Dirt

Saliency pointers and prototypical scenes provide a roadmap. So do a handful of other indicators worth keeping an eye out for.

But first a few more words about saliencies. To locate the most psychologically salient material is not to understand it. It's a start, but only that (the same goes for prototypical scenes). Alexander (1990) also examines ways of transforming salient extractions into units—a number of consecutive sentences that form an entity through shared content, microscopic stories with an introduction, an action, and an outcome—or fragments, whose story line is somehow disturbed (p. 24). Units can be mined for means–end sequences; fragments can not, since they tell no meaningful story (e.g., "My brother has to be, without doubt, the dumbest guy in the world but beside that he's okay"). Alexander provides the following example of a unit taken from an interviewee:

> You know, something happened to me today that really upset me and brought to mind the memory of a time when as a child I didn't speak to my father for close to two weeks. My boss called me in to discuss a report which I had just finished after a week of productive and satisfying effort. He chose to dwell on a minor point which he thought might contain an error. This made me very angry and I sat there dumbfounded. (p. 24)

If one were to rewrite this sequence in its most general or abstract form, the pattern might go something like this: independent effort leads to satisfaction (positive affect), which is interrupted by criticism from an authority, leading to anger and perplexity (negative affect). Then, in cases where transformed bits selected by salience criteria reveal sequences with repetitive properties, one gets a good sense of the fixity and generality of what seemed at first like disparate units. We want always to ask ourselves: How powerful are the subject's sequences, and how pervasive? The prototypical scene might be used in similar fashion; its embedded sequence would be expected to summarize others contained in a subject's less core scenes. In either case, the scene—salient or prototypical—is a primary unit of analysis. As with dreams, its latent content can be inferred as one goes beyond surface features. Or, one can stick with the surface, extrapolating means–end movements and the role played by affect, how positive turns negative or vice versa.

McAdams (1993) also outlines a number of strategies for examining stories, those narratives we offer when asked to explain who we are. His life story interview protocol asks subjects to detail eight key events—what he calls, collectively, "nuclear episodes"—any of which the psychobiographer might focus in on. These include peak experiences, a term borrowed from Maslow—high points or wonderful moments (as in the Robert Evans example at the "Godfather" premiere). Low points or worst moments, so-called nadir experiences, also naturally warrant attention (Capote in the hotel room seems like a definite nadir). What makes the highs so high for any subject, the lows so low? And how do subjects respond to the highs and lows? Such questions move inquiry along. Turning points, because of their tendency to "symbolize a significant change" of self-understanding, likewise can't help but prove edifying. What turned, and why? "Who" survived the turn, and "who" got left behind? Did the turn affect the art a person made, the ideas he championed, the political positions he espoused? All these things we want to know. McAdams recommends the highlighting of earliest memories, important childhood memories, important adolescent memories, and important adult memories. Imagine your subject sitting across from you. Then, relying on your knowledge of the life, imagine her responses. What early memory has she singled out? (In Arbus's case it was the reservoir visit). What childhood memory, adolescent memory, and so on? McAdams's protocol provides a set of questions one may want to "ask" and divine answers to.

One might also, following McAdams's recommendations, search out themes of agency or of communion in key events. Some subjects seem to be exceptionally strongly disposed toward power, autonomy, mastery, and achievement. They cultivate a dominant, forceful style. They command attention in social settings. They cherish courage and valor. These people are agentic. Communion is the path of love and intimacy. Those scoring high on this trait exhibit warmth and friendliness. They listen carefully. They cherish compassion. They espouse beliefs in world peace, human interdependence, and equality. When it comes to the recollection of key events, people with strong power motives favor themes of strength and impact, status, autonomy, and accomplishment. Those with a need for intimacy gravitate toward scenes of love/friendship, dialogue/sharing, care, and unity/togetherness.

Nuclear episodes may also "signal the emergence or development of a particular life-story character" (McAdams, 1993, p. 298). A man high in power motivation might highlight the "warrior" imago. He sees himself (figuratively) as going to war. He's in constant battle. Communal imagoes include the lover, the caregiver, and the "chum."

Recently McAdams, like Alexander, has turned his attention to story sequences (see McAdams & Bowman, 2001). These, McAdams says, are likely to be "both the causes and the consequences of different levels of psychosocial adaptation"

(p. 29). Depressed and nongenerative people may incline toward what McAdams calls "contamination" sequences: a good experience is "spoiled, ruined, sullied" by an emotionally negative outcome. Those who feel relatively satisfied with their lives (who are, in other words, well adapted psychosocially) might sequence stories more "redemptively": the bad is made good. Pain leads to pleasure, growth, learning, self-improvement.

Nuclear episodes, themes of agency or communion, and story sequences of, for instance, redemption or contamination all illumine "authorial" choices made in the writing of a novel that is a life. For McAdams identity is story. We are the myth we create and continually revise. I don't agree. I can't help but see the story as a portal into something deeper, story being what Freud called "manifest" or surface content. The story's a start, not an ending. But that's what this chapter is about: how to start the psychobiographical process. We first uncover the myth; then we make sense of it.

Tomkins's (1987) script theory also provides a framework especially useful for psychobiographers. Scripts, like McAdams's stories and story sequences, are sets of rules for organizing and magnifying affect-laden families of scenes. Limitless in number, more self-validating than self-fulfilling, they are selective in the number and types of scenes they order, incomplete even within the scenes they magnify, both inaccurate and accurate in terms of their interpretation of events, and continuously reordered depending on their type. Tomkins foregrounds several common possibilities. Affect scripts concern the control, management, and salience of affect. Affluence scripts govern positive affect scenes, contamination scripts ambivalent scenes that resist decontamination, and antitoxic scripts purely negative affect scenes (with limited success). Ideological scripts "attempt an account for how life should be lived and the place of human beings in the cosmos" (p. 160). They represent faith, whether religious or secular. Commitment scripts "involve the courage and endurance to invest and bind the person to long-term activity and to magnify positive affect in such activity" (p. 167). Toxicity scripts address scenes of sufficient negative affect density and threat that they must be opposed, excluded, avoided, or defeated. Nuclear scripts—with commitment and ideological scripts the type most explored by Tomkins—"utilize a self-defeating double-strategy of both minimizing negative affect and of maximizing positive affect, and so do neither" (p. 168). They arise from "the unwillingness to renounce or mourn what has become irresistibly seductive and the inability to recover what has been lost" (p. 197). As such, they are involved in "idealized defenses against idealized threats to idealized paradises" (p. 197).

If we want to stay alert to the appearance of trademark story sequences or key events, we would also do well to remain watchful for types of scripts. A difference between McAdams and Tomkins—however slight—is the centrality of affect. To Tomkins affect is positively key. We script either to amplify (in the case of single scenes, like the prototypical scene) or magnify (in the case of families of scenes that are co-assembled) feelings. Homing in on types of scripts therefore requires that we do the same with respect to affect. And that is tremendously valuable. We don't want only to know which stories get told most; we also want to explore how subjects react to particular qualities of feeling, and how feelings reliably produce sets of responses (i.e., scripts). Scripts are patterns of reaction, preferred modes of self understanding. They validate personality. Knowing some of the forms they take and what these forms may mean in the context of a life allows us to know the life itself—in uniquely dynamic fashion.

Last Words

So there you have it. I promised "strategies for working with biographical data and highlighting those of unusual prominence and psychological importance." Now these very same have been arrayed before you. Of course, locating what to interpret, number one, and advancing cogent interpretations, number two, are very different tasks. The former, while scarcely easy, is still quite a bit easier than the latter. But in what follows advice as to the latter, as well as numerous distinguished examples of how to achieve it, both are in generous supply.

My feeling has always been that we learn most about effective interpretation by reading what

strike us—usually purely intuitively—as effective interpretations. Some psychobiographical essays just seem right; they uncannily persuade. We find ourselves seduced by the happy gestalt they produce. When this happens, when we feel won over, it is always—without fail—uniquely instructive to ask why. What about the chapter made it so appealing? The structure of the narrative? The organization and presentation of the evidence? The employment of theory and the artful way it got applied? The biographical sources? The way what had seemed to be so chaotic ineffably assumed coherence? Take as your model the chapters that convince you. Ask how they did it, then aim for the same with your own work. The quality of cogency is hard to put into words. But as they say, we know it when we see it. And when we see it, we need to take notice, to learn as much as we can from those rare exemplary instances of unusual illumination.

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