ABOUT THIS BOOK

A Note to Instructors and a Guide to Examination

The first composition reader to invite critical thinking about the thinking process itself, *Mind Readings* appeals to students' inherent fascination with psychology and self-discovery while introducing them to the practices of interdisciplinary inquiry and academic writing.

FEATURES

A refreshing and relevant new theme for composition courses. As the first composition reader to focus on *cognition*, or the processes of thinking, *Mind Readings* introduces a trove of material that appeals to students' perennial interest in their own, and others', inner lives. The book invites students to explore irresistible issues like the many "selves" that make up personal identity, the boundary between human and animal intelligence, the difference between male and female thinking, and the impact of electronic communication and computers on human nature, while introducing them to interdisciplinary inquiry and academic writing.

Readings that bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities. Because the mind is a subject that equally concerns thinkers and writers in the humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences, the 61 readings reflect the range of disciplines students will encounter throughout their college careers. Selections from the humanities include 16 personal essays, four scholarly essays, and seven classic works of short fiction by authors such as Ian Frazier, Patricia Hampl, John Berger, and Maxine Hong Kingston. Twenty-four selections from a variety of disciplines in the sciences and social sciences include works by Daniel C. Dennett, Deborah Blum, and Richard Dawkins.

Organization that helps students move from personal experience to academic thinking and writing. *Mind Readings* invites students to make connections between their own interests and experiences and broader intellectual questions. The chapter sequence encourages students to move from personal to more academic forms of discourse, with the earlier chapters on sense, memory, and self offering ample opportunities for writing based on personal experience, while later chapters on "other," animal, and machine minds lend themselves to assignments emphasizing analysis, research, and argumentation.

Editorial apparatus helps students become capable academic thinkers and writers. *Mind Readings* offers students the practical pedagogical support they need to read effectively and produce thoughtful academic writing, including a general introduction; detailed headnotes and suggestions for prereading, journal, or discussion activities before each selection; and two sets of discussion questions following each reading.

Class-tested materials from a best-selling textbook editor. Gary Colombo is co-editor (with Robert Cullen and Bonnie Lisle) of *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*, Fifth Edition, the best-selling cultural studies reader ever published. He draws on a wealth of teaching and publishing experience. *Mind Readings* and the selections included in it grew out of his research on reading, writing, and cognitive theory.

TopLinks Web site at www.bedfordstmartins.com/mindreadings. This site connects students to carefully selected research links, allowing them to extend the work of the book.

Mind Readings

AN ANTHOLOGY FOR WRITERS

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Bedford / St. Martin's

Boston ◆ New York

Living Backwards

ARNOLD M. LUDWIG

Nineteenth-century American novelist Stephen Crane packed a lot of living into a remarkable short lifespan. By the age of twenty-four, he had won national acclaim for his now classic depiction of the American Civil War in *The Red Badge of Courage*. By twenty-nine, he had died of tuberculosis in England after participating in Cuba's war for independence from Spain, surviving a celebrated shipwreck, and sharing the last years of impoverished self-exile with Cora Howorth Taylor, his lover and former owner of the "Hotel de Dream" brothel of Jacksonville, Florida. Crane, it seems, had the habit of living his life "backwards"—he acted out the plots of his novels and stories after having lived them first in his imagination—a not so remarkable phenomenon according to psychologist Arnold M. Ludwig. In fact, as Ludwig suggests in this provocative selection, we all live our lives backwards, to a certain degree, by shaping our notions of self around the life stories, plots, and roles we inherit from the social context we grow up in. Each one of us adopts a part to play in life from the "scripts" written for us by the collective imagination of our culture. Ludwig is E. A. Edwards Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine and the author of seven books, including *The Price of Greatness* (1995), and *How Do We Know Who We Are?: A Biography of the Self* (1997).

BEFORE READING

Freewrite in your journal about the person you'll become in 20 to 30 years. What will you be doing? Where will you live? With whom? What social role or roles do you see yourself playing? Share these imaginative "prebiographies" in class and try to explain where they come from.

According to the biographer Christopher Benfey, Stephen Crane lived out events in his imagination long before he experienced them in reality.[1] Contrary to expectations that a writer's works are based on past experiences, he actually wrote about events before he experienced them, making his fiction eerily predictive of what lay ahead. For instance, his only experiences with battle, as a highly paid war correspondent, came years after he published his novel about the Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage*, acclaimed worldwide for its vivid portrayal of war. He wrote *Maggie*, his novel about a prostitute, long before he fell in love with a real-life madam. Some time after writing several stories about shipwrecks, he actually found himself aboard a foundering steamer. In his novel, *The Third Violet*, he wrote about courting a society belle; later, he carried out a courtship with one through his letters. To dismiss these instances as coincidental cases of life imitating art is to overlook the full implications of Crane's experiences. In a metaphorical sense, he seemed to be living his life backwards, experiencing the future before it happened.

I asked Christopher Benfey, "In what way was Stephen Crane's double life different from that of others?"

"In Crane's case, the relation between the life imagined and the life lived struck me as so literal and extreme and almost lock-step that he seemed a particularly good example of *lived doubleness* that I think is common to just about everyone."

"Why do you think he did that? Why did he have to translate his fantasies into reality?"

"If I were required to sketch out what such a motivation would be, I could give two parts of it pretty quickly, and the third part might still need a good deal of psychological expertise. The first two are cultural. Crane grew up in a household that was intensely religious and intensely involved with a fairly literal interpretation of the Bible. His father was a Methodist minister. All of his uncles on his mother's side were Methodist ministers. His grandfather was, and so on. One tenet of a certain kind of nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity is that you model your life on the Good Book.° So the idea of living his life according to an earlier script could not be more deeply ingrained in Crane's temperament.

"The second thing is that Crane lived in a journalistic culture, in addition to the religious culture . . . that tended to frame the story first and then go out and try to find it. Crane's letters are full of requests to cover the next streetcar strike or to write a certain kind of story before the event actually happened. He also worked for people like Hearst° whose basic view was that if you didn't have the news story that you needed, you went out and tried to create it. There is some evidence that Hearst did engineer the sinking of the battleship *Maine*° in order to get the U.S. involved in the Spanish American War.

"So those are two parts of what I would think of as a three part motivation. . . . The third is tougher. [It has to do with] the reason for the particular extremity and literalness of Crane's write-it-then-live-it temperament, and I don't really see a way to go much further with that, except by finding other temperaments who seem the same way and trying to see what they might have in common. This is a character type that you sometimes run into with writers."

Does this mean that you actually live portions of your life backwards with future experiences preceding present ones, like the rewinding of a videotape? Of course not. Your inexorable progression through successive developmental stages insures that you will move forward in time until your biological clock winds down. What it means more exactly is that you exhibit what Christopher Benfey called "lived doubleness," meaning that you simultaneously live in your imagination and in the real world, even though these experiences may not be in synch. When the imagined experiences you explicitly think about, write about, or express in other ways come true, they create the illusion of a reversal in time. Because the future comes to be experienced before it actually happens, it takes on aspects of the past.

"the Good Book:" The Bible.

Hearst: William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951), American newspaper publisher.

the battleship *Maine* The sinking of the *Maine* in Cuba's Havana Harbor in 1898 was widely regarded as the reason why the United States entered the Spanish-American War later that year.

The notion that you, like Crane, may experience portions of your life in a reverse order raises important questions about the nature of the self. From an experiential standpoint, what if all you take for granted about the temporal course of your life is the other way around, and your life represents not so much a progression into the future as a realization of the past? This has a ring of science fiction about it. Instead of building your life only on past experiences, you actually may be living your life to conform to stories already written for you. If you aren't a novelist, like Crane, your stories may be vague and inchoate, without clear narrative structure, but stories nonetheless, waiting for you to live them. Much of what you do in life—maturing, selecting a mate, procreating, exhibiting certain temperaments, aging—may be written in your genes in a language you don't yet know how to decode, creating erosions and gullies over the unexplored terrain of your life through which your life story flows. Perhaps much of what you strive to become is already preordained for you by your biological predisposition, inculcated in you by your parents, suggested by cultural myths, or spelled out in places like the New Testament. Perhaps you spend your life seeking experiences that you're supposed to have and that feel "right" because they are indelibly written on your mind in an invisible script. If this be so, then over the course of your life, you simply become what you're destined to be. . . .

Of course, it's possible to interpret accounts of this sort in different ways. It's customary to view them prospectively and say that these people are responding to the dictates of unconscious conflicts or motives. They still exert choice and shape their own futures. But you also can view their lives retrospectively, arguing that their father's expectations, which were written on their minds from an early age, became their own aspirations, and they pursued them throughout their lives, much as Stephen Crane pushed the objects of his fiction.

What this suggests is that you often live out in your imagination many of the experiences you later seek, but in a less dramatic fashion than Crane. You imagine what your first date or sex encounters will be like, relying on the stories of friends or accounts you read about in magazines or novels. You imagine how colleagues and friends will respond to you if you win some prestigious award, and then spend your life pursuing it. You imagine long in advance the kind of home you want and the lifestyle you wish to lead, and then work toward achieving it. You may not have actually written out parts of your own life-to-be, as Crane did, but you already know much of it in advance, years before you live it. It may be stretching matters a bit, and we may be quibbling over semantics, but it's possible to construe this as living portions of your life in reverse. . . . 5

The Story That Is Not a Story

Because a personal life story is so important for your sense of self, let me recap its essential elements. One of these elements is that you be able to consciously experience progressive change in your life. Your developmental unfolding ensures that you become aware of the passage of time and your relative position along the life cycle. Narrative flow, almost by definition, depends on direction and movement. The second element of a personal story is that you can distinguish yourself from others. Without the presence of another human being, you have no way to define yourself. In a solipsistic universe, a single self becomes the equivalent of all people or merely the expression of God.

To emphasize these points, let me retell the biblical story of Eden to show that it's mostly no story at all, and only becomes a real story when these two elements are present. To this end, I'll assume that the biblical account of the creation story in the Garden of Eden is literally true.

In the beginning, the Lord God creates the heavens and the earth and all living creatures. Then He forms man from the dust of the ground, breathes life into his nostrils, and puts him smack in the Garden of Eden to tend it. He tells man that he may eat freely of every tree that is pleasant to sight and good for food, except for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which stands in the middle of the Garden. If man disobeys this warning, he will lose his innocence and experience death.

So here is Adam, without care or want, wandering endlessly and aimlessly about, plucking delectable fruits off trees and biting into their fleshy pulps or spitting out seeds, perhaps also taking pleasure in his own body, with no other ambition than to "be." He has no need for language since there is no one for him to communicate with. He has no social role since there is no society. He has no conflicts or aspirations since all his needs are met. He is without guile or cunning since these qualities have no use. He has no need to succeed or compete since he already is first in the eyes of God. He has no need for knowledge since this will detract from his innocence. Besides, there are no books, music, or art available anyway, so intellectual curiosity will do him no good. He has no sense of self since he is the only one who exists. He has no personal life story since he leads a life without variety, without change, and without plot—with no beginning, no middle, no end. He has eternal life and Paradise, an existence without need, pain, or conflict. What more can he ask? Yet inexplicably, as days follow days, years follow years, centuries follow centuries, for eternity, he experiences a growing boredom and discontent.

Then the Lord God, in His wisdom, decides that it's not good for Adam to be alone and, after causing him to fall into a deep slumber, makes a helpmate for him out of one of his ribs, a being known as "woman" because she is part of "man." It's at this point that Adam gets the first glimmerings of a sense of personal self, as he begins to communicate with Eve, but his self-ness is negligible since she remains subject to him and he still has no wants. In the development of a personal identity, Eve, though, is more advanced, for she already has a rebellious spirit and constantly urges Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. 10

Eventually, he succumbs. It's only after the Fall, when they both are cast out of the Garden of Eden and beget the long line of the begats and begottens, that Adam and Eve become mortal and the personal stories of man and

woman begin. Only then does each begin to exist in time and space. Each enters a personal life cycle and now must distinguish between the sense of "I" and the sense of "we."

While you may continue to dream of recapturing that idyllic time before the Fall—that undifferentiated, mindless, care-free, womb-like existence, which your progenitors, Adam and Eve, lost—it remains unattainable as long as you retain a personal sense of self. Paradise happens to be a place where time is nonexistent. Without time, you can have no new experiences. Without new experiences, you can't live out a personal life story. Without having a personal life story, you can have no sense of self.

> "Do you believe in Crane's case there was a good deal of illusion, a public persona to get beyond?" I asked Christopher Benfey.
>
> "Sure, I think there are all kinds of masks and false fronts that Crane assumes. . . . But I'm a little uncomfortable with the too easy distinction between a false front or public self on the one hand versus the real self or the authentic self on the other. I think especially for a writer like Crane, that distinction was not always entirely clear for him, and much of what a writer does is to put forth imaginative other selves. They tend to take on a reality that his original self doesn't have for him. When Crane keeps saying, 'I cannot help disappearing and vanishing, it is my form of trait,' that seems to me a very common feeling that an artist may have. It's what Keats° called 'negative capability.' The artist, when he or she is most involved in the creation of art, has a sense of disappearing, of vanishing, of losing or scooping out whatever original sense of self he or she had and projecting an imaginative self that has a fuller reality."

Composing a Life

Whether you believe that you have the power to shape your own life or are fated to do what you do, you can't help construing your life within a story format. There are many reasons for this, but the most important, in my opinion, is that you rely on stories to give coherence to your sense of self and make sense out of your existence. Your personal life story offers you an opportunity to integrate in a cohesive and understandable way the seemingly immiscible mixture of your many biological urges, psychological needs, social responses, and spiritual yearnings. Without some organizing framework for these often competing and contradictory experiences, you likely would be emotionally incapacitated.

Since I rely on a narrative framework to explain many aspects of human behavior, I need to clarify what such terms as "life," "story," "role," and "script" mean. As a general guide, consider that you are born into a life and live out a story in which you adopt certain roles requiring certain scripts. In this process of becoming progressively differentiated from others, you may experience incompatibilities at the different interfaces. Your personal story may

Keats: John Keats (1795–1821), English poet.

be unsuitable for the life you are born to or it may allow the full flowering of your potential. Your roles may fit or not fit your personal story. And the scripts you employ may be inconsistent with your roles or let you function successfully in them. Let me elaborate.

Being Born Into a Life

At the start, much like Adam, you are born into a life. You enter the world as a human being, a biological organism, with potentialities that may or may not be realized, depending on the influences to which you are exposed. Your life itself has no form or meaning as yet, other than the necessity of it being lived. The general parameters of your life are the same for all other members of your species. You progress from inception, to birth, to childhood, to adulthood, to old age, and to death, revealing all the properties of living forms. To live a life, all you need do is to eat, sleep, procreate, protect your territory, age, and fulfill your biological destiny. You don't necessarily need to be conscious of who you are and what you do and why you do it. Mostly, you live your life oblivious to the many forces impinging on you that determine what you can or can't do—your genetic makeup, your biological constitution, the neurophysiological workings of your brain, climatic conditions, the availability of natural resources, familial, social, and cultural programming, historical forces, and other unknown factors. Much of the time, you live your life instinctively as part of the animal kingdom, especially during infancy and childhood—the age of innocence—without seeking meaning in what you do. 15

Entering a Personal Story

With consciousness, reflection, and a sense of time, you enter your personal story. A personal story requires that you possess a self that can serve as a protagonist, someone who can act on the environment and be acted upon by it. Mostly, the broad outlines of your life story are already set out for you at birth and during childhood by the life you enter, as dictated by your biological makeup, family background and cultural heritage.[2] These early influences usually decide the kinds of people you're drawn to, the appeal of certain occupations, and the lifestyle you pursue.[3]

As part of a life story, other characters must exist as well. You aren't an island unto yourself, even when you try to be. You are reared by parents, compete with siblings and peers, work for superiors, select mates, and encounter adversaries. Because you are a social creature, you rarely have the luxury of carrying out your own plot without it impinging on others' lives. You not only inhabit other people's stories, but they also inhabit yours. More likely than not, frictions will develop between you and others, obliging you to modify your story plot. However, if your story line happens to be important enough to you, you stubbornly cling to it, even if that involves upsetting others.

Whatever your personal story, you must live it in a cultural context. One of the major functions of cultures is to insure a cohesiveness among its

members through common languages, codes of behavior, customs, rituals and belief systems. Each culture has its own mythology containing the common dreams and aspirations of its collective people. It's from this vast reservoir of mythic offerings, which are filled with struggles between heroes and villains, good and evil, and the quest for everlasting life, that you derive your own personal story. Myths of this sort serve as harmonizing and stabilizing forces that integrate people with their societies and nature.[4]

Even though your cultural mythology supplies you with the major elements and themes for your personal story, the story you eventually enter isn't always clearly articulated. Stories can be coherent or incoherent, cohesive or fragmented, developed or undeveloped, or rich or poor in content. They also can have different narrative tones, some being upbeat or credulous, others being downbeat or cynical. Not all people embark on a cohesive and developed life tale. Perhaps in the past, when people's livelihoods, social status, educational prospects, and future opportunities were mostly determined at birth, you could predict the course of their lives even before they set forth in the world. With the dissolution of the family, scientific challenges to established beliefs, rapid political change, and shifts in values and attitudes, the similarity and stability of many personal stories begin to disappear. In industrialized, wealthy societies, new stories proliferate and offer a broader range of options.

20 Just as every personal life story has a protagonist, it also has a plot. And a plot or story line represents an unfolding goal or purpose—the quest for immortality, power, control, knowledge, security, or pleasure—that follows a temporal course with a beginning, middle, and end. Even if you somehow manage to lead a relatively conflict-free or uneventful existence in a controlled, regulated environment, as Adam originally did in Paradise, your exposure to the passage of time itself creates a plot since with each succeeding day you change and are one day closer to death.

Naturally, your circumstances and personal inclinations shape the range of stories available to you. The more coherent and cohesive the story, the more it reconciles all the discrepancies and loose ends in your life, the more relentless and attractive its pull, the more each chapter inexorably follows another. You may be drawn, for instance, to the typical middle-class story of professional success, a home in suburbia, membership in a country club, church affiliation, and social respectability. Or you can live out a story for musicians and singers from the 1960s, a frenetic, driven life of alcohol, drugs, outrageousness, and social protest, culminating in your own self-destruction, a story played out so well by Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin°—a story also well known to Kurt Cobain, of the group Nirvana, who also followed suit—all of whom managed to kill themselves at the same age of twenty-seven. Or you can enter the typical life of a daughter of an alcoholic father and a long-suffering mother, by marrying an alcoholic husband, divorcing him because of his drinking, marrying another alcoholic, or perhaps for variety a cocaine user, and then raising alcoholic or drug-using sons and unhappy, caretaking daughters. Or, whether talented or not, you can lead the unconventional life of an artist or poet, nursing your angst and wrestling over the meaning of life in ateliers or cafes. Or you can live out the predictable life of the chronically unhappy housewife, bored by your life, resentful of your husband's perceived freedom and control, wanting to do something meaningful, yet too scared to strike out on your own. Or you can live the life of a high-roller, full of excitement and adventure, sports and gambling, exploring new experiences and living on the edge. Or you can enter the world of high society, associating with others of similar backgrounds and engaging in all those activities that go with your social rank. The stories go on. There is even one if you find none suitable. You can go about reinventing yourself, cultivating eccentricities, saying and doing outrageous things, fabricating your past, and being the center of attention.

Jim Morrison, etc. . . . Rock-and-roll stars who died as the result of their extreme lifestyles and drug use.

Usually, one dominant plot subsumes several different subplots or themes. A major theme running through your life may be to fulfill your role as a parent or a spouse, or as the dutiful son or daughter to your parents. Another may be to serve God, your church, and community. Another may be to be successful in your career. All these themes represent only components of your basic story plot, which may be to lead an exemplary, traditional life as a guarantee for personal fulfillment and happiness. Or your dominant story plot may be the quest for power and success, with all else—family life, friendships, and recreational pursuits—representing only minor themes.

And on it goes. You become an active conspirator in your own life story. You move forward in your life by expressing your past and becoming the character you're biologically, psychologically, and socially disposed to be, if events and others let you.

Although the particular plot you live seems new at the time you're living it, others likely have lived it many times before, with minor details left for you to fill in or alter. As with fiction, original plots are rare. Most tend to be formula-driven and even hackneyed, especially the best-sellers. There's good reason for this. You tend to be drawn to conventional, ready-made plots because those are what your parents, teachers, and society trained you to prefer. Because most of the major parameters of these traditional plots are already implicit or spelled out, you never have to worry about losing your personal bearings, as sometimes happens when you embark on an unexplored course. But with whatever story you enter, you need to convince yourself that you potentially have some measure of control over its course. Unless you have your personal story imposed on you by force, accident, or circumstance, it enhances your sense of selfhood to believe that you select your own story, and not, as may be the case, that the story selects you.

25 It's important to note that your personal story doesn't only include what is actively transpiring in your life; it also corresponds to what you expect your life to be. You may live your life in obscurity, for example, yet constantly yearn

for fame. Under ideal circumstances, your life story and basic aspirations coincide. When they don't, you keep working to reconcile them. If unsuccessful, you remain discontented and ill-at-ease unless you finally become resigned to your lot.

Because the story plot you follow offers a structure for your life, a vehicle for integrating your experiences, and a conceptual map to guide your way, you cling to it to keep from becoming disoriented. It becomes a *de facto* extension of you, familiar experiential territory for your life, and creates the context for your existence. This is why you try to preserve it at all costs. You may not play the prime role in composing your own personal life story, but you play a decisive one in safeguarding it.[5]

Playing Roles

Within each story, you adopt roles, some of which are suited to your ends and others not.[6] A general story theme potentially may be realized through the adoption of assorted roles. For instance, if your main agenda is wealth and power, then you can pursue it through different routes—as a banker, a physician, a professional athlete, a politician, or vicariously through marriage. This is so for most of what you do, whether it be to live in the limelight, to be loved and admired, to lead an artistic and creative life, or to attack and confront authority.

Roles represent implicit or explicit expectations for behavior. They have evolved in society to meet various social needs and to reduce friction among people. Roles govern almost every aspect of social life. There are parental roles, sick roles, gender roles, professional roles, and leadership roles, for example, each defining appropriate attitudes and actions. Conflicts arise between people when their different roles overlap or their boundaries become ambiguous. Turf battles, animosities, and misunderstandings tend to be the inevitable consequences of role diffusion.

While you bring to your roles certain special personal features, they also exert powerful molding effects on you. They have a stability and momentum of their own, giving continuity to your identity, consistency to your actions, and constancy to your life, and enabling you, if they are suitable, to move more smoothly through your personal life story. For other people, the roles you assume convey important information about you and let them know what to expect from you.

Roles also serve as a basis for constructing your own personal identity. 30 Because certain roles convey certain meanings in society, you can use them to represent who you are and base your self-esteem on how successfully you fulfill them. Although certain self-help approaches urge you to step outside your roles to find your true self, the roles you play actually may help you to feel more whole and coherent. Peter Sellers,° the actor, articulated this well when he observed, "When my role is finished, I experience a sudden loss of identity."[7] . . .

Peter Sellers: (1925–1980), English actor famous for portraying multiple parts in his movies.

As guides for how to play various roles, you often rely on role models, either by directly observing their behavior or incorporating images of them within you.[8] These internal images that you accumulate over the years of parents, teachers, celebrities, or other inspiring persons sometimes remain distinct and identifiable, but mostly they fade and become absorbed and assimilated into your sense of who you are. They provide the blueprints for your thoughts and actions, and keep you from responding haphazardly when you encounter new situations.

Using Scripts

For each of your many roles, you have available a number of ready-made, prepackaged scripts that let you function effectively, efficiently, and convincingly.[9] You dress in certain ways, decorate your office in certain ways, act in certain ways, and say certain things that are expected of you when you play your parts. The requirements of your various roles tend to be almost ceremonial, conventional, and ritualistic, allowing for automatic and instant exchanges with others to facilitate social discourse. To play the role of a friendly neighbor, you utter standard greetings, comment on the weather, and offer other chit-chat and pleasantries. As an enlightened parent, you try to do and say all the things that enlightened parents are supposed to. As a celebrity, you make the usual authoritative pronouncements, speak elliptically, or make outrageous statements to show that ordinary standards don't quite apply to you. If you are a politician, you remain vague and equivocal so as not to give offense. And so it goes.

The importance of scripts is that they let you function comfortably in your roles. They are the basis for ritual and convention. They represent automatic, acceptable responses for a variety of situations and usually tend to be stereotyped and predictable. They play a large part in etiquette and decorum, telling you how to act in various social interactions at work, at home, and with your family. You may have several scripts to choose from for a particular role, but in time the scripts you use and the roles you play become intertwined. There are even common scripts for people who play the role of people writing their own scripts, such as being openly promiscuous, saying or doing outrageous things, and being tactless or self-centered.

Of course, you have a certain degree of freedom to make planned or impromptu changes in the scripts available for your roles, adding a distinctive stamp of your own, but that doesn't detract from the basic similarities that continue to exist. There's usually good reason for this since without a certain standardization in scripts, your behavior loses credibility for others or becomes less expressive of your role. It's as though an implicit protocol governs what you do and say and how you appear. Certain behaviors are associated with certain roles and others aren't. For example, you tolerate preaching from your preacher and not from your barber. "Feminine" women aren't supposed to be aggressive or outspoken. Employees are supposed to be deferential

toward their employers. The scripts represent a shorthand for informing others about your roles, and your roles represent a shorthand for telling them about the plots you've selected and the stories you're living. Scripts that are incongruous or inappropriate raise suspicion and gain undue attention. There's some slack about how you play your roles, but if you digress too much or are too deviant or too unorthodox, you can expect to encounter public censure or rejection.

Playwright or Actor?

So powerful influences shape the nature and direction of your life, inducing you to inhabit standard life stories that have a beginning, middle, and end, and that mostly conform to certain culturally acceptable themes. Depending on your perspective, you can make a case for living your life prospectively, interpreting your experiences as the result of prior causes or personal choices. Or you can make a case for living your life retrospectively, interpreting your experiences as echoes of similar lives already lived or as already written parts you must play. Not unlike a Greek play, you act as though you can modify your fate, while the chorus of the voices in the background proclaims what you must do.

Whatever your perspective about causality, what transpires in your life needn't be as inexorable as it first seems. Playing a role and participating in a personal story aren't incompatible with personal freedom. To observe that Stephen Crane later led a life already conceived in his imagination is perhaps less amazing than the fact that he conceived of these events in the first place. Where did his phenomenal understanding of war or life with a prostitute or the nature of a shipwreck come from? There was no *Red Badge of Courage* or *Maggie* before he wrote them. These works seem to have been a product of his creative imagination, which brought into being something that didn't exist before. Therefore, if you say that he led his life backwards in time after his writing, you also must conclude that he lived it forwards in time before. This suggests that within the context of his own personal story, he has shown authorial freedom himself. Semantics? Perhaps. But with important implications about the extent of your personal freedom.

Pursuing Shakespeare's metaphor of all the world being a stage, we find that participating in a play needn't mean performing in rote fashion, with no opportunity for spontaneity or creativity. Like an accomplished actor on stage, you presumably have the opportunity for improvisation at times and can interpret your roles and the meaning of the story in your own distinctive way. And like Stephen Crane, you may be able to create the future before you live it.

Whoever the Great Playwright happens to be who formulates your personal story, provides your roles, and writes your scripts, he, she, or it seems to have created a mystery that underlies every personal plot, which has to do with the extent to which you can compose your personal life story or are only an actor in the unfolding drama. Obviously, you have little personal control over much of what is already written out for you when you are born into a life. But you may

have more leeway in the course it takes than it first seems. You may not be the main author or even a collaborator in the composing of your life—since if it was largely up to you, you likely would have written it differently (perhaps choosing a longer life span, the absence of disease, more talent, or greater intelligence)—but you realistically seem to be able to function as a biographer, shaping and revising the material you have responsibility for, to make your life more meaningful and improve the quality of the story. This little bit of biographical freedom lets you believe that you can make crucial decisions at major forks in the road, to take "the road less traveled," so to speak. And, . . . you may well have that option, as long as you act within the relative constraints of your many roles and don't wander too far from your unfolding story plot.

Notes

1. C. Benfey, *The Double Life of Stephen Crane* (New York: Knopf, 1992).
2. J. Kagan, *Galen's Prophesy: Temperament in Human Nature* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). Also see W. Gallagher, "How We Become What We Are," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1994, 39–55; and C. R. Cloninger, D. M. Svrakic, and T. R. Przybeck, "A Psychological Model of Temperament and Character," *Archives of General Psychiatry, 50* (1993): 975–90.
3. See M. Csikszentmihalyi and O. V. Beattie, "Life Themes: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration of Their Origins and Effects," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology 19* (1979): 45–63, for how unresolved, early life conflicts have profound effects on the dominant themes governing individual's lives. Of course, this is likewise a basic assumption of psychoanalytic theory.
4. See J. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, with B. Moyers (New York: Doubleday, 1988) and J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). Also see S. Keen and A. Valley-Fox, *Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning in Your Life Through Writing and Storytelling* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989); L. Rue, *By the Grace of Guile: The Role of Deception in Natural History and Human Affairs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994); and D. P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow, 1993) for discussions of the role of myths and stories in our lives.
5. Plots can be driven by talent or intellectual and motivational needs as well. By virtue of a superior facility, a person can be drawn to art, music, or chess as a major medium for personal experience and then, eventually, for personal fulfillment. Gerald Holton, in *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), describes the importance of "themata," around which individuals organize their lives and ideas. Also see E. E. Jones, "Interpreting Interpersonal Behavior: The Effects of Expectancies," *Science 234* (1986): 41–46 for an excellent account of the role of expectancies in human behavior. A. G. Greenwald, "The Totalitarian Ego: Fabrication and Revision of Personal History," *American Journal of Psychology 35* (1980): 603–18, discusses the reasons for cognitive constancy.
6. There is vast literature on social role therapy. Talcott Parsons, of course, has written the pioneer work in this area. See *The Social System* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959). Also see D. P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, and R. F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

7. P. Evans, *Peter Sellers: The Mask Behind the Mask* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 191.

8. D. P. McAdams *(The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self)* discusses the importance of "imagoes" and role models in our lives.

9. Silvan S. Tomkins ("Script Theory," in *The Emergency of Personality,* J. Aronoff, A. I. Rabin, and Robert A. Zucker, eds. [New York: Springer Publishing, 1987]) also developed an important theory about human behavior based on "scripts." In his particular usage of the term, a script represents the basic unit of analysis for understanding persons. Some scripts are innate, but most are innate and learned. The learned scripts originate in innate scripts but usually radically transform them. These innate and learned scripts, in turn, affect most behavior patterns in adult life. Also see M. J. Horowitz, "Person Schemas," in *Person Schemas and Maladaptive Interpersonal Patterns,* M. J. Horowitz ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); J. L. Singer and P. Salovey, "Organized Knowledge Structures and Personality: Person Schemas, Self Schemas, Prototypes, and Scripts," in *Person Schemas and Maladaptive Interpersonal Patterns,* M. J. Horowitz, ed.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. What exactly does Ludwig mean when he says that Stephen Crane lived his life "backwards"? In what sense do we experience "lived doubleness"?
2. What point is Ludwig making through his retelling of the biblical story of the Garden of Eden? Why does he believe that without a personal life story "you can have no sense of self"? To what extent would you agree with this assertion? Why?
3. Where do our personal life stories come from, according to Ludwig? What common "plots" does Ludwig identify in relation to American cultural mythology? What other common plots are associated with the cultures you participate in?
4. Why, in Ludwig's view, do we tend to adopt "ready-made" life stories and plots? What do the roles that we play do for us individually and socially? What other advantages can you find in this adoption of socially recognizable roles and plots?
5. What are "scripts" and how do they relate to the roles we play? What might be included in the script for a chance meeting between two "friendly neighbors"? In the script for an annual checkup at the doctor's? For the first phone call home to the parents from an entering freshman college student? For a chance meeting between two first-year students at the campus cafeteria? For ordering lunch at McDonald's? For ordering dinner at a four-star restaurant in New York?
6. What questions does Ludwig's theory of life stories, roles, plots, and scripts raise about the nature of the self, free will, and destiny? How free are we, in Ludwig's view? Do you agree that most of us live within the constraints of the role we choose—or are given—to play in life? Why or why not?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

1. Compare Ludwig's notion of "biographical freedom" with the way that we shape our life stories—and presentation of self—according to Susan Engel in "Then and Now: Creating a Self Through the Past" (p. 192). To what extent would Engel be likely to agree with Ludwig about the roles and plots that shape our identities?
2. To what extent is it possible to interpret the conflict between Dee and her mother in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" (p. 283) as a clash between differing roles, in Ludwig's sense of the term? What roles have Dee and her mother chosen to play? What "script" would Dee write for her mother to perform during their reunion, if it were in her power to do so? What script would her mother write for Dee? How free are Walker's characters to "choose" the roles they play in life?
3. How does Rubén Martínez's description of his early infatuation with film heroes in "Technicolor" (p. 306) support or complicate Ludwig's theory of "lived doubleness" (p. 292)? What roles or scripts does Martínez adopt from the multiple cultures he grows up in?
4. Working in small groups, sketch out plot lines for several of the life stories that Ludwig identifies with the "mythic" context of contemporary American culture—plot lines for the middle-class story of professional success, for the unconventional life of an artist or poet, the chronically unhappy housewife, the high roller who lives on the edge, and so forth. Later, compare your plot lines in class and see how closely they match. Does this informal experiment confirm the assumption that these stories and plot lines are commonly available throughout our cultural context?
5. Read James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" (p. 390) and evaluate how Ludwig might interpret the conflict of Sonny and his brother in terms of the life stories they've decided to act out. What roles have Sonny and his brother chosen to play? What motives lead them to choose these roles? What plots are associated with these roles? How do Sonny and his brother rise above these stereotypical expectations?

ESSAY OPTIONS

1. Write a paper in which you analyze two or three roles that you have been attracted to as models for your life story. What themes or values do you associate with these roles? What attractions do they hold for you? What drawbacks or limitations do you see associated with living out these life patterns?
2. Drawing on the ideas of Ludwig in this selection, Robert Sapolsky in "Ego Boundaries, or the Fit of My Father's Shirt" (p. 254), and Susan Engel in "Then and Now: Creating a Self Through the Past" (p. 192), write an essay discussing the role that the self plays in creating a sense of continuity and coherence in our lives. How does the concept of selfhood order our inner world? What roles does it play in our social relationships? What costs are associated with the notion of a continuous, unchanging self?
3. Using ideas and experiences presented by Ludwig, K. C. Cole (p. 75), Walker Percy (p. 118), and Daniel L. Schacter (p. 157) as points of departure, write a paper about the difficulties of living in the present. How do phenomena like Schacter's "binocular vision," Ludwig's "lived doubleness," and Percy's "preformed complex" supposedly tie us to the past? What dangers do these authors associate with the tendency to view the present through the past?