

FAIRY TALES AND SCRIPT DRAMA ANALYSIS

Stephen B. Karpman, M.D.

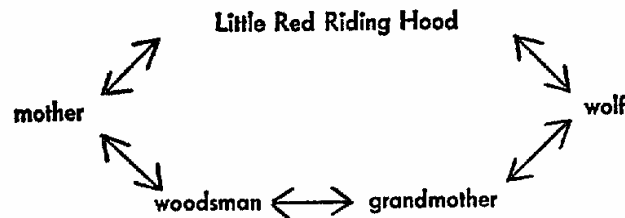
Fairy tales help inculcate the norms of society into young minds consciously, but subconsciously may provide an attractive stereotyped number of roles, locations, and timetables for an errant life script. To date, the scientific structural analysis of scripts has been based on the Script Matrix (See Steiner, TAB April 1966). In this paper I will present some diagrams for drama analysis of the script, using familiar examples from well known fairy tales.

Drama can be analyzed as switches in role and location on a time continuum. The intensity of the drama is influenced by the number of switches in a time period (Script Velocity) and the contrast between the positions switched (Script Range). Low velocity or range is boredom. The time for each switch varies independently, from surprise through suspense.

1. **ROLE DIAGRAM.** As ego state analysis is part of structural and transactional analysis, role analysis is part of game and script analysis, in defining the identities involved in the action. The slogan-identity on a man's "sweatshirt" usually represents the slogan of his script role. With this slogan it can be ascertained, often with a direct question, what role he is playing in life.

A person "living in a fairy tale" usually has a simplified view of the world with a minimum of dramatic characters. The role diagram provides a means of fixing this set number of key identities visually in therapy. When a person knows his "favorite fairy tale" the key roles can be listed in a circle and from there the life roles can be fit. Less often this is worked in reverse, and the classic story found that fits the roles. This vividness and imagery in circumscribing the action has a usefulness similar to game analysis.

The arrows in the diagram indicate not sequential action, but the rule that all roles are interchangeable, and that a person may play each of them at one time or another, and may see other people, such as the therapist, in each of them at one time or another. Some people may show expressions or mannerisms of several of these at once, as in the case of Little Red Riding Hood (presented below) who at times looked like a grandmother and walked like the woodsman. Ageing, for Little Red Riding Hood, probably means first playing her mother and later her grandmother. The rule of interchangeability is the same as in game analysis where at one time or another, a person plays each of the hands in his game, and in dream analysis where "every person in the dream is the dreamer." A treatment may not be complete until a person's position in each of the roles is analyzed



ROLE DIAGRAM

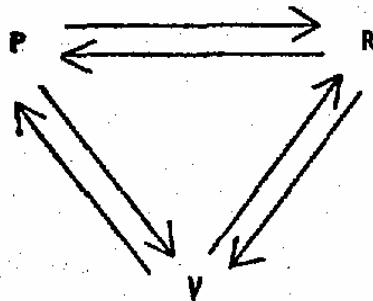
2. DRAMA TRIANGLE. Only three roles are necessary in drama analysis to depict the emotional reversals that are drama. These action roles, in contrast with the identity roles referred to above, are the Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim, or P, R, and V, in the diagram. Drama begins when these roles are established, or are anticipated by the audience. There is no drama unless there is a switch in the roles. This is indicated by a change in the vector direction along the diagram. Examples will be given from three fairy tales to illustrate some of the ways of using this.

A. In the Pied Piper, the hero begins as Rescuer of the city and Persecutor of the rats, then becomes Victim to the Persecutor mayor's double-cross (fee withheld), and in revenge switches to the Persecutor of the city's children. The mayor switches from Victim (of rats), to Rescuer (hiring the Pied Piper), to Persecutor (double-cross), to Victim (his children dead). The children switch from Persecuted Victims (rats) to Rescued Victims, to Victims Persecuted by their Rescuer (increased contrast).

B. In Little Red Riding Hood, the heroine starts as Rescuer (food and company to grandmother, R V, and friendship and directions to the wolf, $R \leftarrow V$). In a suspense switch she becomes Victim to the wolf-Persecutor ($P \rightarrow V$), who in turn, in a surprise switch, falls Victim to the woodsman Persecutor ($P \rightarrow V$) who, in this one act, playing two roles at once (increased velocity), also Rescues LRRH and grandmother ($R \rightarrow VV$). In one version, LRRH playing all three roles, winds up as Persecutor sewing stones in the wolf's belly with the woodsman. Grandmother's switches go $V \leftarrow R$, $V \leftarrow P$, $V \rightarrow R$; the wolf, $V \rightarrow R$, $P \rightarrow V$, $V \leftarrow P$ (arrow direction indicates initiative, the letters refer to the participant's position on the triangle).

C. In Cinderella, the heroine switches from Victim double Persecuted (mother then stepsisters), to Victim triple Rescued (fairy godmother then mice then prince), to Victim Persecuted again (after midnight) then Victim Rescued again. A rough quantitative analysis can be made of the intensity of the drama for her by totaling up the switches; $V_{pp} \rightarrow V_{rrr} \rightarrow V_{pp} \rightarrow V_r = 8$ switches.

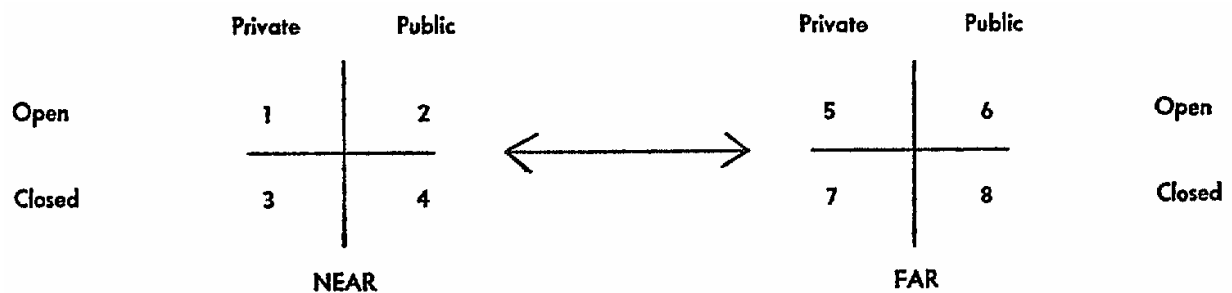
Drama compares to transactional games, but drama has a greater number of events, a greater number of switches per event, and one person often plays two or three roles at once. Games are simpler and there is one major switch, i.e. in "I'm Only Trying to Help You" there is one rotation (counterclockwise) in the drama triangle: the Victim switches to Persecutor and the Rescuer becomes the new Victim.



DRAMA TRIANGLE

3. LOCATION DIAGRAM. A. Drama. The Location Diagram simplifies the switches in location to the major vector axis Near and Far, both of which have minor divisions into Closed and Open, and Public and Private. The drama is in the switch in location, and is intensified by the Script Range (house to castle ballroom, Wuthering Heights to China, front yard to Oz, etc.) and Script Velocity (changing adventures of Pinocchio, Ulysses, etc.). Many other factors can be added to step up the degree of contrast experienced as well as intensifying the role drama, such as time of day or season, temperature, noise level, lighting, dimensions, unconscious symbols, etc. Weather and landscape play a strong part in historical novels that show switches in characters during a switch in history.

The diagram is numbered here only for reference to the list of examples below it which draws from fairy tale as well as real life locations.



LOCATION DIAGRAM

1. Clearing in the woods, pond, front yard, rooftop, open pram.
2. Market place, playground, street parade, swimming pool, stadium, freeways.
3. Pond, oven, burrow, bedroom, consultation room, brain.
4. Tavern, theatre, witness stand, delivery table, conference rooms, elevators, locker rooms, supermarket, gambling casinos, hospitals.
5. Flying carpet, hilltop, enchanted garden, milky way, tundra, sky, desert, prairie, quiet beach, safari trail.
6. Magic kingdoms, ships, ski resorts, battlefields, summer beaches, European cities, Timbuktu, Heaven.
7. Cave, grotto, gingerbread house, whale's belly, castle tower, space station, Egyptian tomb, igloo, diving bell, underground passages, casket.
8. Wonderland, castles, vacation hotel, reform school, slave quarters, barracks, cabarets, cathedrals.

Imagining an actual trip between any two of the above in one day reveals the drama in the switch in locations. A diagram within a diagram for a finer location analysis could be made by redrawing the entire location diagram within anyone of the eight subdivisions. Some examples from that would include the contrast of being closed in an open space (outdoor telephone booth, rocket ship, etc.) and being in a closed space that is both private and public (wedding chapel, restroom, etc.).

B. Space structuring. In therapy, the location diagram can be used to visually illustrate location changes a person has made, and at times in comparison to others. It may be useful to show a person's travel patterns and liken it to a script pattern. Many classic stories have Odyssey patterns that include much travel, while others have long sleep times of no travel, such as Sleeping Beauty and Rip Van Winkle. A fairy tale pattern of travel, such as house — woods — clearing in the woods far away — gingerbread house can be charted numerically as 3 — 1 — 5 — 7 for reference.

Space structuring, like time structuring, can be useful in similar ways. Visually it illustrates eight possible preferences and locates where a person spends his time. For a script pattern, the scene of someone's tragic ending can be localized in advance, and a 'script trip' avoided. One patient realized her suicidal drinking stemmed from fears of living alone (private, closed apartment) and changed this by getting a roommate.

Changes in life spaces can result in a bender or a reprieve. Important life decisions are established on entering new script locations, such as a new job, home, vacation, or on entering therapy. Changes in location also may result in separation anxiety or arrival anxiety, often charged with script significance.

Interpretations about what room a person seems to psychologically be living in, with its imagery and concretization of reality, has long been a part of TA therapy techniques. People carry their script rooms around them, leading to such things as pillow talk in a conference room, public lectures in a bedroom, bathroom talk at a PTA social, and tenement house talk at a debutante ball. Parental injunctions can influence location overlaps, such as "Don't ever leave home" and "Be in two places at once." In one case a man who was warm and friendly in his office but cool and aloof in the hallways was discovered to have grown up living in a single room with his mother, and hallways were a no-man's-land as he moved in life from one warm room to another.

4. CHILDHOOD SELECTION. The exposure a child receives to influential myths, fairy tales, and classic stories varies from family to family and culture to culture. Cultures vary not only in the natural selection of popular tales to be retold and reprinted and in the writing of new ones, but in the versions of the well known ones that are available. Perhaps a half dozen or more different artificial, tacked-on endings are known to Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood alone. A mother reading stories to her child has a pick of versions that are happy, sad, violent, inauthentic, etc. Her age or marital status or preference for the child may influence her pick. Many fairy tales include "getting rid of the kids for awhile" indicating that they may be therapeutic for the mother, a communication to her children, and that they pass on through the generations as much due to the mother's preference as for the child's. Children's readers provide a script role (i.e. "The Curious Chimpunk") but not a script in that they are not intuitively derived "classics." Sometimes a person who cannot remember his favorite fairy tale has only to ask his mother, who will remember.

The script matrix has been used to plot the formative parental permission and injunction transactions. Various script-forming transactions occur at the time of the reading of the fairy tales. A nudge or a warm smile by mother may mean “that’s you” and put a “Don’t think. Be Cinderella.” on the script matrix. In the spirit of fun and a “Let’s pretend” contract between mother and child, certain of the very important “Don’t think” injunctions can appear, such as “Don’t notice minor players,” “Don’t pay attention to the endings (payoff) ,“ and “Go through it over and over again.” The fairy tale is particularly effective and “takes” if it reveals the “family myth” around the child, as well as giving the longitudinal time matrix for the injunctions to be carried out.

A CASE HISTORY. Sometimes the mother and child might miss the moral of the story and contract that the minor roles are more attractive than the one of the hero or heroine. In a case which might be called “Little Red Riding Hood meets ‘waiting for Cinderella’” presented at the San Francisco Transactional Analysis Seminars, a mother cast her three children in separate roles in a “family fairy tale.” It was an interesting example of sibling birth order and personality formation in that they were cast in the order of appearance in the Cinderella fairy tale. The older sister, the blacksheep of the family and without permission to look attractive, was the Stepsister who took her unhappiness out on the younger sister, later overworked the Cinderellas she supervised at work, then overworked her daughter after being married and divorced. The second born sibling was Cinderella, abused and undiscovered in childhood, converted by religion (fairy godmother); she grew up with permission to be pretty and married well. The third child born was a boy, a charming prince type who was always “waiting for Cinderella” but had something unexpected happen to all his romances (the midnight “Rapo” in his castle) and came into therapy because he wasn’t “living happily ever after.”

His girl friend, a Little Red Riding Hood type, came in for therapy too. When young, she was taught by her father “Experience is the best teacher” and “Do as I do, not as I say” and was told interesting luridly detailed stories of his “woodsman” adventures as an officer with the Los Angeles vice squad. At night in San Francisco she would stroll innocently around in the “woods” of the Tenderloin and North Beach districts and never got harmed. One day she met the optimistic, “waiting-for-Cinderella” prince, but continually yelled “wolf,” from her fairy tale. He experienced this as once again something “unexpected” happening to his romances. It wasn’t until much later that he rescued her from the North Beach wolves who had talked her into being a call girl (errands) whereupon she fell in love with him as the awaited “woodsman” in her script, and gave up her game of “Stupid.” But for him, she wasn’t his Cinderella anymore because it hadn’t been love at first sight.