

# PSYCHODRAMATIC PRODUCTION OF DREAMS: "THE END OF THE ROAD"

JOHN NOLTE, JAMES WEISTART, and JEAN WYATT

*Sangamon State University, Springfield, Ill.*

J. L. Moreno to Sigmund Freud (1912): "You analyze their dreams. I try to give them the courage to dream again."

—*Psychodrama, Vol. I, page 6.*

## INTRODUCTION

From prehistoric times, man has apparently been fascinated by his own dreams. Originally this preoccupation was focused on attempts to predict future events from dreams, or, in the earlier days of the "period of enlightenment," with the debunking of such notions. Sigmund Freud, declaring the dream the "royal road to the unconscious" shifted the emphasis from the future to the past and sought understanding of his patients' deeper, darker impulses through analysis of their dreams. To the psychodramatist, dreaming is a creative process and the dream can be thought of as representing the early stirrings of creative impulses. As such the dream may both reflect past experiences as well as point to future directions in the dreamer's life.

Dreams that eventually become psychodramatized tend to possess one or more of three characteristics. They are nightmares, they are repetitive, or they seem important but puzzling to the dreamer. The goal of psychodrama dream production is to "extend the dream beyond the end which nature has set for the sleeper or at least the end which he remembers" (Moreno, J. L., 1951). In doing this, the protagonist may be assisted 1) in confronting the fears underlying the nightmare; 2) in working his way through resistances to finishing the processes underlying the repetitive dream, or; 3) in exploring the meaning of the perplexing dream.

## CASE STUDY

The dream presented for this discussion illustrates the classical procedure for psychodramatic exploration of a dream described by Moreno (1951) some years ago. It is of interest in that it is both a nightmare and a repetitive dream occurring regularly for a period of 15 to 16 years.

The drama occurred during an intensive one-week residential psychodrama training workshop. The protagonist, during a discussion of psychodramatic

production of dreams, had indicated her desire to explore a repetitive dream and the group, about 11 individuals, had agreed to schedule this session for her.

DIRECTOR: Well, Jean's been preparing herself for this evening's session, I suspect. Why don't you join me up here? (*JEAN joins DIRECTOR on stage.*) You have a dream that keeps recurring. (*JEAN nods.*) Recurrent since when? How long have you been having this dream?

JEAN: For the last 15 or 16 years.

DIRECTOR: And what was going on in your life when you began to have this dream?

JEAN: Nothing unusual. Nothing that I know of that could have caused me to have the dream.

DIRECTOR: All right. Now, Jean, I don't want you to tell me the dream, but I do want to know some things about it. Is it a nightmare?

JEAN: Well, actually it starts out sort of pleasant. But it turns into a nightmare before it is over.

DIRECTOR: I see. Now, you've said it is repetitive. Are there any variations to it or is it exactly the same dream every time that you have it?

JEAN: It's exactly the same dream every time. Over and over. Nothing varies in it. Every detail is just the same.

DIRECTOR: And how often do you have the dream?

JEAN: Oh, once a week, on the average. It is getting more frequent all the time. And it is growing in proportions. It is on a larger scale, it seems.

DIRECTOR: Once a week. When was the last time you had it? Have you had the dream since you've been here?

JEAN: No. The last time was a week ago Monday night.

DIRECTOR: About eleven days ago. O.K., let's begin right there. Where were you then, when you had this dream?

JEAN: At home. I live in a trailer home.

DIRECTOR: What we want to do to help you warm up to having this dream is to see you as you go to bed. What time is it? What are you doing as you get ready to go to bed? Let's set up the scene for your bedroom.

JEAN: All right. Here is the bed.

DIRECTOR: Single or double?

JEAN: Single. And here's the dresser. The room is paneled in wood colors.

(*She spontaneously sets the scene describing the furniture and decor of the room.*) And over here is a desk and chair.

DIRECTOR: Oh, this room also serves as your office?

JEAN: It is where I live. (*Continues to describe the room and set it up.*)

DIRECTOR: O.K. Lets see how you prepare for bed.

JEAN: I lock the front door. Turn out the lights. (*She is pantomiming as she describes herself.*) Come into my bedroom. Turn on the lights.

DIRECTOR: It's all right. Just show us. (*JEAN continues to pantomime taking off her clothes, going into the bathroom and taking a shower. Then she puts on a nightgown and goes to bed. She is lying on her side.*) Is this the position you go to sleep in?

JEAN: Yes. (*DIRECTOR finds her a pillow, which she puts under her head.*) I keep a night light on. I sleep on top of the covers.

DIRECTOR: Fine. Now, let's soliloquize, Jean. Let us hear the thoughts that may be going through your mind as you lie here going to sleep.

JEAN: I'm so tired. It seems that the more I do, the more I have to do. There are so many things that I want to get done.

DIRECTOR: And your feelings. Would you soliloquize your feelings?

JEAN: I'm too tired to think about work. I'll try to think about something nice instead.

DIRECTOR: What do you think about that is nice?

JEAN: Last weekend was the best in nine months with Holly and Heather. We really had fun and just enjoyed ourselves.

DIRECTOR: The best weekend in nine months. And it is with thoughts about the weekend that you go to sleep?

JEAN: Yes.

DIRECTOR: All right. Relax. Take a deep breath. As you let it out, let the tension in your body go with it. (*Pause*) Again. And let yourself go to sleep. Feel yourself drifting off to sleep. (*After a long pause to let JEAN relax.*) How long after you have gone to sleep does the dream begin? Is it early in the night, or later?

JEAN: Right before I wake up in the morning.

DIRECTOR: All right. Go ahead and sleep through the night. (*Another long pause.*) It is getting toward time to wake. What time is it?

JEAN: Around five.

DIRECTOR: Let the dream begin, Jean. Just have the dream again. Watch it in your mind's eye. Let me know when it is over. (*Director has placed a hand on JEAN'S arm. He watches her closely, noting that she trembles during the dream, perspires, and her foot moves slightly. She opens her eyes and has a troubled look on her face.*)

DIRECTOR: Does the dream wake you?

JEAN: Yes.

DIRECTOR: All right, Jean. Now we want to see the dream in action. Let's go to the first scene. Is there more than one scene?

JEAN: Well, it changes as we go along.

DIRECTOR: Let's begin at the beginning. Where are you?

JEAN: I'm in a car on a country road.

DIRECTOR: O.K. Let's set that up. (*Chairs are placed to represent the car. Jean sits in the driver's seat, holds on to "steering wheel".*) What kind of car is this?

JEAN: A big black one.

DIRECTOR: Are you alone? How fast are you going?

JEAN: Yes, I'm alone. I'm going along pretty fast. I'm anxious to get there.

DIRECTOR: Where are you going?

JEAN: Home, it is Christmas.

DIRECTOR: And what time is it?

JEAN: It is night time.

DIRECTOR: (*Has lights turned down until room is rather dark.*) And what is happening?

JEAN: Well, I'm driving down this black-top road. And I know in a minute when I go around this curve that I'll be able to see the house. I know that my kids are there. It's Christmas and I have a lot of packages in the car. It is cold.

DIRECTOR: And now what happens? What do you see?

JEAN: Now I am up to the fence, a white board fence. I can see the house over there. (*Points ahead of herself and to the left.*) I can see the lights, the Christmas tree lights. The kids are still up. I am driving along and I know that pretty soon I'll come to the gate. And I know that the gate will be open for me. They've left it open for me. (*She continues driving, then begins to look perplexed.*)

DIRECTOR: Yes? What happens?

JEAN: There's just fence here. No gate. I should have gotten to the gate. The fence keeps going on. There is no gate!

DIRECTOR: Lets here your thoughts. (*Doubles*) "Where is the gate? What's going on here? Something is wrong!"

JEAN: (*Nods desperately*) I can't get home!

DIRECTOR: Again. Let's hear that again, the way you feel it.

JEAN: I CAN'T GET HOME!!

DIRECTOR: What happens next? Have you passed the house?

JEAN: No, the house kind of stays in the same place. I keep driving looking for the gate. (*Director has group become the fence posts moving past the car.*)

DIRECTOR: What do you feel? Is there more to the dream? What do you want to do?

JEAN: I want to put on the break (*pushes with her foot*) but the brake doesn't work. I take my foot off the accelerator, but the car doesn't slow down. The door won't open! (*Becomes increasingly agitated.*)

DIRECTOR: Brakes don't work. Door won't open. What are you going to do?

JEAN: I'm helpless. I take my hands off the wheel. The car is driving itself. The house is receding. A hill is coming up. I am going to go up the hill. And when I go over the hill, I know that there will be nothing there. (*She is very upset.*)

DIRECTOR: O.K. Jean. Let's go up the hill now. (*He tips her chair backwards.*) Up the hill. (*Pause.*) Now we come to the top (*pauses*) and now we go over. (*Waits a moment.*) What is it like? Are you suspended in space? Are you falling?

JEAN: I don't know. I'm just there. I am suspended.

DIRECTOR: O.K. Show us what it is like. (*Jean gets out of chair and curls up on the floor.*) What is the feeling of this?

JEAN: I don't know what this place is. I don't know how I got here. I don't know why I'm here. (*Pause*) And now I start falling.

DIRECTOR: Let yourself feel that. Let yourself fall. Are you scared again. (*Jean nods.*) Do you feel like screaming? Do you want to scream? Go ahead. (*He puts a hand supportively on her head.*)

JEAN: (*Screaming*) NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!

DIRECTOR: (*Doubling for the protagonist*) "NO! I don't want. . . ."

JEAN: (*Hesitates*) No, I don't want to die.

DIRECTOR: (*After a period of silence.*) Is this the end of the dream? Do you awaken now?

JEAN: (*Nods*)

DIRECTOR: Fine. Open your eyes then. Soliloquize.

JEAN: Damn! Will that never stop? Will I ever get used to this?

DIRECTOR: (*After a few moments silence*) Well, Jean I'll tell you what we are going to do. We are going to let you have this dream all over again. Only this time, I want you to change it in any way and at any time that you want. O.K. Get back in the car. We'll begin at exactly the same place with you in the car on the blacktop road. Do you want to change anything? What kind of a car are you in?

JEAN: It is a big black Lincoln. And it is just full of presents.

DIRECTOR: O.K. Now we are coming to the fence. (*Has group form the fence.*) Do you want to change anything?

JEAN: (*As she drives along*) Yes. The gate is there and I turn in. (*The "Fence" makes a gap and JEAN turns in.*) And I drive up to the house. I can see the Christmas tree through the window.

DIRECTOR: How big is the Christmas tree?

JEAN: (*Smiling*) It's really big.

DIRECTOR: I thought so. What happens next?

JEAN: Holly and Heather run out. The twins.

DIRECTOR: How old are Holly and Heather? Let's pick some auxiliaries. (*Two members of the group become Holly and Heather.*)

JEAN: They are ten. (*To the girls*) There are presents for all of you in the back of the car.

DIRECTOR: Yeah. Take them in the house and put them under the tree.

JEAN: Then the rest of the family come out. (*Auxiliaries are picked up for the other four children. They come out and there is much greeting and excitement getting presents out of the car and into the house.*) And then Bob comes out.

DIRECTOR: This is the man in your life these days?

JEAN: Yes. (*Another auxiliary is picked for BOB. He and JEAN embrace.*)

Then we all go into the house, into the living room where the tree is. (*All do so.*)

JEAN: (*Suddenly*) I don't like this living room. Now I remember where it is. It is my grandmother's living room.

DIRECTOR: Well, let's change it then! Make it any room you want. (*As JEAN is thinking this over*) O.K. What's next?

JEAN: Well, now what I would really like is to sing some carols and then exchange gifts.

DIRECTOR: Of course! (*He asks auxiliaries to take it from there, using their own spontaneity. They sing carols. Then unwrap packages and generally produce the happy excitement of Christmas time. They follow JEAN's lead as she produces cues for them. Finally, the activity slows down.*) Well, Jean. Now that you have all the kids here, is there anything you would like to say to them?

JEAN: (*Thinks a moment.*) Just that I'm so proud of each one of you.

DIRECTOR: It must be about time for the kids to go to bed, isn't it? Time for JEAN and BOB to have some time together?

JEAN: Yes. (*She shoos the kids off to their rooms.*)  
(*To BOB*) Christmas is my favorite time.

BOB: Yeah. I think it's my favorite time, too.

JEAN: I'm so glad you are here to share this with me. It means so much to me. (*JEAN and BOB continue to chat cosily. Finally the DIRECTOR speaks.*)

DIRECTOR: Looks to me like it may be time for Jean and Bob to go off to bed too. (*They laugh and the group joins them. The DIRECTOR dismisses the auxiliary and has JEAN re-set the scene to her bedroom in the trailer, where the original dream had taken place. She lies down on the bed.*) I'll bet this dream doesn't wake you up. Go ahead and dream it as long as you want. Then wake up when you are ready.

JEAN: (*Lying alone. After a period of time wakes up.*)

DIRECTOR: The sun's come up. (*Asks for lights to be turned up. Has JEAN join him in center stage.*) Shall we stop here? How do you feel?

JEAN: Relieved. Lighter. Hopeful. I think I also feel more confident. I can't integrate all this right now.

DIRECTOR: No, I don't expect you to. You've done a lot of work. I think we should stop here. We could explore more, but I think you have done

enough for this evening. We will save the rest for another time if we need to. My bet is that you won't have this dream again. And if you should, let me know. I have my ideas on what else could be done. But for now, let's let your natural processes take care of things for a while.

Now is the time to share. (*Group members do so.*)

## DISCUSSION

Moreno (1959) identifies four stages or phases of psychodramatic dream production. They are:

1. The original dream.
2. Psychodramatic re-enactment of the dream.
3. Psychodramatic extension of the dream.
4. Post-psychodramatic effect on the dream.

Let us examine Jean's dream from this structure.

The status nascendi of the original dream is in the mind of the dreamer during his sleep. The production is solitary, unshared by others. The dream may, as in Jean's situation, be repeated over and over again, reminiscent of a broken record. One gets the impression that it has not been finished. This phase has happened before the psychodrama proper begins, of course.

The second phase typically occurs in two parts. First, the protagonist is warmed up to the moment in which the dream was originally dreamed. Moreno writes (Moreno, J. L., 1969, p. 157) :

In a psychodramatic dream presentation we say to the protagonist "Don't tell the dream, but act it out." We don't mean it only in a sort of superficial way. Let the protagonist go to bed. Let him re-enact every detail . . . The protagonist goes first into the role of the sleeper before he can be a dreamer . . . We try to recapitulate the natural process of living, instead of just analyzing in an unrelated way. That's concretization of the situation in which the dream is presented in the here and now.

This process is apparent in Jean's drama as well as in Moreno (1951, 1969). This procedure serves to develop and increase the "warming up" to the psychodramatic enactment of the dream itself, the next step.

The depth of production is enhanced by avoiding a verbal account of the dream. "Telling" the dream, putting it into words, tends to conserve it. As sociologists have pointed out, an individual's language system is highly colored by the culture in which he learned it. The psychodramatist's goal is

to go beneath the language to the "actional level" and foster communication from there. At the same time, the director may need some information about the dream in order to assist the protagonist in staging it effectively. In Jean's drama, the director explicitly tells her what kind of information he wants and asks her *not* to relate her dream. This principle is also observable in the dreams presented by Moreno.

The protagonist is asked to set the scene, select her auxiliaries, and produce the dream in action. Although every psychodrama is a unique event and the choice of particular dramatic techniques must be consistent with the protagonist's needs for expression, there are some general principles which are specifically applicable to dream production. The first of these has to do with the very personal aspect of the dream. All the spontaneity in a dream is one's own. There is no counter-spontaneity as there is in interaction with other individuals. Therefore, although auxiliaries are used quite freely, even to represent apparently inanimate objects, such as the white board fence in Jean's dream, it is extremely important that the protagonist's perception of the dream be followed as minutely as possible. In the enactment of the dream, the auxiliaries do not alter or expand the roles into which they are cast as is often allowed or encouraged in the enactment of an encounter.

The third stage, the extension of the production of the dream, is probably the most crucial and important phase of the entire process. Here, if the principles of spontaneity are appropriately applied, is where the repetitive dream may be laid to rest, the nightmare expurgated, and the "important dream" integrated. On occasion, the direction in which to take the drama is obvious. One simply continues on from the point at which the protagonist indicates that the dream ended when it was originally dreamed. At other times this procedure is awkward or the director may feel that some aspect of the dream should be altered in order to allow the protagonist relief (catharsis) from the experience. Here, the procedure is to start from the beginning with instruction to the protagonist to change anything about his dream that he wishes to change. This is generally a very pleasing task for the protagonist and the director can expect him to take to it with enthusiasm. Sometimes, however, the protagonist may be primarily avoidant towards the dream and his modification of it consists of replacing strong or threatening aspects with bland ones, or he will simply try to eliminate and cut out action which he did not like. The effectiveness of the drama will be enhanced if the director encourages the protagonist to expend at least as much energy in producing the modified dream as he did in producing the original.

During this phase, auxiliaries' counter-spontaneity may be released to a greater extent. This allows the director, if need be, to use this resource in

warming the protagonist up to his task. It is still, however, the protagonist's dream.

In Jean's drama, both extension and modification of the original dream occurred. Extension occurred at the point in the drama when the protagonist began going up the final hill into some kind of a void. This is the point at which she always awakened when experiencing this as a night dream. The director took her on, into the void. Here a significant meaning of the dream emerged. It was obvious that the dream reflected some concerns regarding the protagonist's own death.

The director also felt that it would be most helpful for the protagonist (and the group) if she were allowed to re-do the dream in a different manner. Hence he asked her to return to the beginning of the dream and to make any modification in it that she wished. He was relatively confident that she would complete the fantasy in keeping with the original happy direction in which it seemed to have started.

#### THE FOURTH PHASE

Moreno's "fourth phase" deals with the effects of having psychodramatized a dream. It raises the crucial question which all therapeutic interventions must face: What has been achieved by the procedure?

Because both Jean and the director are members of the same university community and belong to an ongoing psychodrama group, there has been a chance for considerable discussion between them on this question. During the first few weeks following the drama, Jean reported that the dream had not returned. She was sleeping longer and sounder for which she was grateful since she had developed a lung infection and required more rest. She didn't believe, however, that the dream would not return. She would settle, she said, for just a few weeks of freedom from it.

Later, approximately two months after the psychodrama, she reported that she had looked back over the notes that she and one of the group members had made of the session and she found that she did not want to spend any time thinking about the experience. She related that the whole thing seemed kind of distant, and although she knew very well that it had happened, it didn't seem so real. As she was talking, she said, "You know, I think I am beginning to believe that I am through with that dream."

Approximately four months after the drama, the protagonist and the director discussed in detail the changes that had taken place in her life following the drama. She identified four areas of her life in which she had made significant modifications.

The day following the conclusion of the workshop, Jean had walked into her trailer with her daughter who remarked, "This is like living in a

terrarium, Mom." Jean was immediately struck by the fact that her house was entirely decorated with browns and earth tones. "It was like living underground," she commented, "like in a tomb." That had seemed all right until then, but it suddenly became distasteful to her and on that very day, she found another place with bright colors and moved.

The second change involved patterns of sleeping. All of her adult life, Jean stated, she never seemed to need more than 6 hours. This changed immediately and she began to sleep 6, 7, even 8 hours. "The time that I slept 11½ hours was just unbelievable," she said. She also found that she could, for the first time since a child, take naps in the daytime. Associated with this was a general decrease of tension.

The third difference that she noted was in driving. She stated that she had not been aware of it, but suddenly realized that when she was driving, especially in unfamiliar areas and on unfamiliar roads, she was apparently always looking for, always expecting to come upon that stretch of road which she had traveled so many times in her dreams. She stated that she now realized to what lengths she had gone to avoid driving an unknown road at night. Since the drama, she said, her confidence in driving has increased manyfold and she was no longer afraid of going anywhere, any time.

The most important alteration in her behavior was a rapidly developing self-assertiveness which manifested itself especially with respect to her job and to her ex-husband. She found herself getting irritable, more demanding, and "even aggressive" in both situations. For the past year, Jean had invested herself heavily in her new job. She realized, she said, that she had done so largely for her own "therapy." Suddenly she was aware that she was devoting entirely too many hours a week and too much of her energy to the mental health agency for which she worked. In response to some threatened cutbacks in funds, which would have affected her salary, she resigned, re-wrote her job description for two people, and some weeks later accepted one of the new positions.

Jean had left her marriage in some desperation, knowing that there was something unhealthy about the relationship between her husband and herself. She had, however, never quite been able to deal effectively with her ex-husband's expectations that she would some day return to him. She knew that she did not want to, but being unable to rationalize her feelings, she still retained some uncertainty and some feeling that he just might be right. Following the drama, she reported that for the first time she had felt real anger toward him. This was sufficiently bothersome to her to explore it further psychodramatically. Following this, she began bringing about some closure to that relationship. She noted that "I had always managed to ex-

cuse Jerry because I knew why he acted that way. I could never get angry at him. Now I can. I don't have to go on making excuses for the way he behaves."

The "meaning" of the dream remained a puzzle for some time. Although it was obvious that the "message" of the dream had something to do with death, Jean was unsure of what it might be since she had had occasion to reconcile herself to dying some years previously. She related that she expected death to be very much like the "void" in her dream, and even though she didn't want to die, she did not really fear it particularly. Eventually, she decided that the dream probably reflected her fears of a "living death," of not living her life as fully as she possibly could. In light of the changes she made following the drama, this interpretation made a lot of sense.

After four months, Jean had not had a recurrence of the dream.

The dramatic impact of her drama upon Jean's life raises questions about how psychodrama works, as well as the relationship between dreams and daily behavior. Although the marked changes in her behavior are not simply the result of a single psychodrama session but reflect a readiness on her part and probably a long period of preparation, it is also apparent that the session played a major role in catalyzing and unblocking, allowing Jean to put into action desires and needs that had previously been unfulfilled.

## CONCLUSION

Because dreams are so very personal and come from the innermost parts of oneself, the psychodramatization of a dream is frequently a very intense, meaningful experience for both protagonist and group. The basic rule for the director is "handle dreams with great care and gentleness."

The results of dream production tend to be great. Repetitive dreams seldom return. A sense of relief and catharsis accompanies dramatization of a nightmare. A new understanding of the processes underlying dreams is common. But the most important feature of psychodramatic dream production, which distinguishes it from earlier approaches to dreams, is that it gives the individual a chance to experience his dream in a greater reality, and in so-doing, to gain autonomy over his dream patterns (Moreno, Z. T., 1965).

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- The authors can be reached at 129 S. Douglas Ave., Springfield, Ill. 62704.*