

A NOTE ON POETRY IN THE PSYCHODRAMATIC EXPERIENCE

Arthur Lerner*

My primary concern in this brief comment is with "Psychodrama in Four Acts" as an affirmation of life. During a series of training sessions conducted by the Moreno Institute at the University of Connecticut, for mental health professionals, its author was a protagonist. It was her first experience with psychodrama.

As we read the opening lines of the poem "Risk brought me here to center stage" and follow through the course of the poet's psychodramatic experience we go through a series of emotional and intellectual stages reminiscent of Theodore Roethke's poem, "Journey to the Interior." We are told in the note appended to the poem there was a time lapse in which the protagonist experienced "floating through the perceptions, sensations of that experience." In this regard, the poem is the statement and revelation of a dream pattern, with a beginning, a middle and end and a hope for the future.

A skilled person in psychodrama is a skilled artist. Thus, warm-ups, time techniques, fantasy techniques, sharing, closing and a host of other such phenomena can be pinpointed in the poem testifying that psychodrama is an alive art very much in the mainstream of being. The thrust from beginning to end of the poem reveals the anguish and guilt (with the psychodramatist moving the creative process toward a higher state of awareness) until Dad becomes a human being (as do other figures in the past) and the clarity of the closure is revealed in the last stanza.

Finally, it is my belief that Avis Crowe's "Psychodrama in Four Acts & an Epilogue" could only be inspired by a psychodramatist for whom poetry is an important part of the life experience. I regard the poem as part of the energy flow which such a director inspires as a dedicated professional.

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PSYCHODRAMA IN FOUR ACTS & AN EPILOGUE

I

Risk brought me here
to center stage.
I took a halting step
and chance or two
and was chosen.
I feel affirmed, and eager.
But pleasure quickly
shifts to pain—
What lies ahead?
What agony,
What truth will I encounter
along the way to
wherever you are taking me?
Which mess will I be forced to face—
What windmills will I do battle with?
Too late for turning back.
My destination's forward,
even if the way to
Get me there is backwards.
Take me where you will, then,
but please—be gentle, guide.

II

Setting scenes and time and
introducing all the players
I'm drifting up and down through
swirling layers of past
and present, mom and dad and
me, a child/adult loos'd from
my moorings, suddenly afraid.
Cut adrift from now,
yet acutely aware of all those eyes . . .
watching, waiting.

Who are these people? Why am I here?
That's not my mother—or my dad.
Tears begin their rise. I can't.
Where is this going. I can't do it.
What does she want from me?
Can't do it right.
(Ah, yes—the critic—my constant companion)
So hard to recall
the me and she and he of
another lifetime. STOP.
I'm a fussball piece being batted back and forth.

III

No, wait. I hear voices raised,
anguish untarnished by time . . .
voices linking my today with yesterday,
in pain. I move
across the frontier of time and space.
The spectator has quietly stepped aside
leaving the actor immersed in
shimmering moments
of the past relived, but with a new sound.
My own voice is heard
with words I've kept locked away
all these years, unleashed.
They startle me, these new sounds
I hurl across the room like poison darts.
Spent, I wrap relief that follows
all around me.
It seems finished. No?
No, not yet. Dad wants—needs
to speak. To give me gifts
he could not give before.
And I could never ask.

IV.

His words come, and fall like
spring rain on the desert.
I receive them and am nourished, though
my eyes perceive a different reality.
I feel joy, but sadness, too, for the
other universe we might have shared.
I bring myself quietly back to joy.
Then, in the stillness of suspended time
my gentle guide invites me
even further back. Dad takes me
on his lap, the hallowed place I
longed for but never had a right to be—
'til now. The final gift,
an offering. I feel a tremor of shock,
a catch of my breath. Deep within
my whole being says YES.
THIS is what I wanted. I could not ask;
you could not give. Now,
holding me in your arms you give
me back the freedom to be me.
It is an incandescent moment.

V.

(EPILOGUE)

I'm jolted back to now.
Suddenly the child on Daddy's lap
becomes middle-aged,
perched awkwardly on legs I hardly know,
acutely aware of having stood naked
in front of strangers.
Trying to hold the moment;
Ecstasy does not last.
I am weary, drained—yet fulfilled.
Full comprehension
will come later. It is enough now just
to feel.

Thomas Wolfe was wrong.
I *did* go home again.
Not to stay,
but for a visit—long enough
to reclaim a vital piece
of me I'd left behind;
and bring it back into today
so I can soar headfirst and whole
into tomorrow.

Avis Crowe
May, 1979

Note: This poem was inspired by a particularly profound session in which I was protagonist. The session took place on a Tuesday—the poem was written a week later, after days of floating through the perceptions, sensations of that experience.