Theory and History

Germany, Nineteenth Century: Psychodrama Before Moreno

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The emergence of psychodrama continues to be the subject of controversy, and Dr. J. L. Moreno himself has contributed to this confusion. The first time the term *psychodrama* appeared in English-language scientific literature was in 1937, in the first issue of Sociometry, where Moreno began publishing his theories and practices in the United States. While Moreno claimed to start developing psychodrama with children as early as 1911 in Vienna, the conceptual clarity and methodological rigor of the approach evolved over time, leading to inconsistencies in how it was defined and understood by both practitioners and scholars. His tendency to blend theatrical, experimental, therapeutic, and spiritual elements—often without clear distinction—further complicated its reception in academic and clinical communities. Interestingly, there are references appearing in German literature as early as the 19th century, starting with the work of Richard von Meerheimb (1825–1896), considered then "the founder of Psychodrama." In addition to publishing several books since 1887, and to promote this new genre, Meerheimb founded in Bremen a "Psychodrama Literary Society," with its "official organ," a specialized journal. However, while the word indeed appeared earlier, the development of psychodrama as an exploratory, educational, and therapeutic method is still widely attributed to Moreno.

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The emergence of psychodrama continues to be the subject of controversy, and Dr. J. L. Moreno himself has contributed to this confusion. The first time the term appeared in English-language scientific literature was in an extensive 70-page article signed and published by him, entitled "Inter-personal therapy and the psychopathology of inter-personal relations", in the first issue of his journal *Sociometry*, in 1937.

However, in the first volume on the subject, *Psychodrama*, published 9 years later, its own creator stated that "psychodrama was born on Fool's Day, April 1,

1921, between 7:00 and 10:00 p.m." (Moreno, 1977, p. 1). Later, in *Psychodrama—Action Therapy and Principles of Practice*, the third volume of the trilogy dedicated to this subject, he reported that "in fact, when psychodrama entered the scene in 1911 it was opposed to legitimate drama as well as to the Commedia dell'Arte. It was probably the most radical rejection of the theatre since Socrates and Plato" (Moreno & Moreno, 1975, p. 24). In another moment, Moreno mentioned "the advent of psychodrama" in 1923 (Moreno, 2012, p. 42). So then, when was it: 1911, 1921, or 1923?

Dictionaries do not readily serve as useful sources, either. The prestigious *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, for example, in its second edition, includes the term "psychoanalysis" (Neilson, 1940, p. 2000), but there is no reference to "psychodrama." For its part, the famous *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) registers "psychodrama" as being used for the first time in 1932, associated with the name of J. L. Moreno, purportedly on the back cover of the monograph *Group Method and Group Psychotherapy* (OED, 2025). As for the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, when consulted by e-mail about the source of their information, one of the editors acknowledged that it came from the OED and that, since he had not been able to confirm it, he preferred to go with the safer option of 1937 as the year in which the term psychodrama was first used in English (Davidovich, personal communication, October 8–9, 2013).

In a separate note, without mention of a date, the American psychiatrist Samuel Kahn, in his book *Psychodrama Explained*, reports that "the word *psychodrama* was coined by Dr. J. L. Moreno from the Greek words *psyche*, meaning mind or soul, and *drama*, meaning to do or to act" (Kahn, 1964, p. 1). The introduction is signed by Moreno himself, who makes no comment about Kahn's statement. A clear reference made by Moreno appears only in his article *The Religion of God-Father*, published 2 years prior to his death:

> The next step started in 1925 with my moving from Europe to the United States of America, establishing myself with a secular name, J. L. Moreno, and becoming a philosopher and a scientist, trying to continue through group psychotherapy, psychodrama, sociometry and encounter groups – that to which I had devoted my previous, religious life. I coined the terms group therapy, group psychotherapy, encounter groups, and psychodrama, and defined sociometry as "the science of measuring interpersonal relations." (Moreno, 1972, p. 213)

As far as can be verified, the 1937 date appears to be the first in which the term appears in English, already associated with Moreno's name. The element of surprise happens, however, when we move over to German. The traditional German encyclopedia that the editor Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus starts publishing in 1811 and that his heirs would continue to publish for more than a century under the title Brockhaus Konversationslexikon (1902–1910, p. 496) says:

> **Psychodrama:** (Greek), a monologued [*Dichtung*] poetry that presents an agitated dramatic action and distinguished particularly from the monodrama or one-person scene by the fact that it is performed without any stage equipment. The founder of "Psychodrama" is Richard von Meerheimb, born January 14, 1825, in Großenhain in Saxony, who since 1872 has lived in Dresden as a colonel. In addition to other poetry, he has published: "The World of 'Psychodramas'" (4th ed., Berlin, 1887) and two small volumes of "Psychodramas" (in Reclam's "Universal Library"). A collection of "Psychodramatic Poems" (Bremen, 1893) was edited by F. Hähnel. In Bremen, since 1893 there has been a magazine, "World of 'Psychodramas'" (Brockhaus, 1902–1910, p. 496).

It is important to consider the fact that the word *Dichtung*, translated here as *poetry*, usually has a broader meaning in German than in English and, as in this case, does not refer exclusively to the lyrical genre but to a literary work in general.

The existence of another form of psychodrama prior to Moreno's birth has not been registered to date, in any of the works on the subject I consulted in English, Spanish, French, or Portuguese. However, this is not something unheard of either. On the contrary, in 1986, Professor Dr. Horst Gundlach of the Institute for the History of Modern Psychology at the University of Passau, Germany, published an article on this subject in the journal *Geschichte der Psychologie* [History of Psychology].

With the title *Psychodramen—zur Geschichte der Psycho-Trivia* [Psychodramas—About the history of the psycho-trivial], Gundlach presents the news as if addressing his students:

> A question in the examination catalog could be the following: WHO invented psychodrama?
> The answer presumably should be marked with a cross: Jakob Levy MORENO, 1892–1974. Score: false, zero points—he studied following his notes.
> Long before Moreno, a certain Richard von MEERHEIMB proposed something he believed was fit to be called psychodrama (Guimarães, 2023). It was a new art form for interpretation and for the stage, in which a single person came on stage. To promote psychodrama, he founded a society and a specialized journal created expressly for this purpose. Based on these three premises, it can be noted that Meerheimb was proposing something quite different from Moreno, for whom psychodrama was neither a new literary form nor, in any way, a one-man enterprise. So then, why should the history of psychology be concerned with this Meerheimb and his psychodrama? Certainly not to show that perhaps Moreno must have kept in his unconscious, from the time he lived in Vienna, Meerheimb's

> expression, to then return and gift it to the world, transformed. If this could be shown, it would be of some interest but of no great importance (Gundlach, 1986, p. 27). [Capital letters from the original]

What actually interests Gundlach is to take advantage of this finding to defend the need for psychology, as a science, to also deal with "fashions, psychofashions or however one wants to call them." According to him, "the historian of psychology should also know the psychofashions of centuries, decades, years and seasons, to come back to the question of how historians of psychology could deal with the psychodramas of Richard Meerheimb."

After providing a series of biographical data about "the founder of psychodrama," including the founding of a literary society, as well as an "official organ of the Psychodrama Literary Society and a journal for friends of contemporary literature," Gundlach ends his text by affirming that "Meerheimb dies in 1896, the title of the journal changes, the expression 'psychodrama' pales in the collective memory, until Moreno rediscovers or takes it up again" (Gundlach, 1986, p. 30).

In an annex to his article, Gundlach presents the facsimile of the frontispiece of *Psychodramen—Material für den rhetorisch-deklamatorischen Vortrag, von Richard Meerheimb* [Psychodramas—Material for rhetorical-declamatory interpretation, by Richard Meerheimb], still presented in the Gothic alphabet, *fraktur* style, and edited in Leipzig in 1888, that is, 1 year before Moreno's official date of birth.

Meerheimb's book presents 13 psychodramas—5 in prose form, 8 in poetry—introduced with a foreword by Carl Friedrich Wittmann. Seeking to define this "new literary form," Wittmann explains his vision:

> By psychodramas (dramas meant for interpretation) the author proposes that these should be understood as interpretations which, delivered by a single person, present in a digressive and artistic way the progressive action of one or several individuals (...) The interpreter does not narrate, he constructs the action in front of the listener. It does not require any theatrical device; these are, rather, dramas or dramatic scenes that, based on the progressive action of several [characters], visible only and exclusively to the eye of the spirit, are characterized only by means of a single character who speaks and who answers (counters), and thus the soul of the listener penetrates to a certain extent the drama that is unfolding *at that very moment*. This is a new form, undoubtedly very fruitful and revitalizing, which – I can well affirm – has found from this moment an undisputed recognition: a form in which the spoken word excites and gives such wings to the fantasy of the listener – a fantasy that is listening – that the acting figures, without being visible, nevertheless

> appear visually before the soul. (Wittmann, 1888, pp. 5–6) [italics from the original]

Wittmann tries to provide more detail still, stating that "in psychodrama, through a single character, the action is constructed and unfolds before the eyes of the listener's soul. In the thinking process, the performer puts himself completely in the place of the actor(s)." Moreover, explains the author of the prolog, it is not a "staged" production. In other words, these texts do not require of the interpreter, "who may be seated or standing behind his interpreting table," "anything else for their embodiment other than the linguistic instruments that operate between the tongue and the lips, the mastery of spiritual, logical and musical accents in the *art of discourse*" (p. 7).

Although Professor Gundlach does not mention it, the book to which he refers was not the first published by Meerheimb on the subject. Two years earlier, in Berlin, *Monodramen-Welt—Material für den rhetorisch-deklamatorischen Vortrag, von Richard Meerheimb* [World of Monodramas—*Material for Rhetorical-Declamatory Interpretation*, by Richard Meerheimb] was published. It is the "expanded third edition of monodramas in a new form," whose prolog begins by alluding to "the controversial question, which raises so much scholarly dust, as to whether 'monodrama' (psychodrama), introduced into German literature by the famous epic and colonel Richard von Meerheimb, really represents a 'new' art form or not" (Meerheimb, 1886, p. V).

The answer to this question, through fragments of a letter reproduced by Meerheimb in the same prolog, is offered by the art historian, professor at the technical college and director of the Dresden Museum, Hermann Hettner:

> Yes, definitely, it is a new form, and doubtless a very fruitful and reinvigorating one! (...) The form requires conciseness, firm delimitation, epigrammatic precision, clear grouping, grand style. And you have precisely fulfilled all these requirements. Your merit is all the greater, as our drama now strays further and meaner into the flattest realism. (...) And what a variety of topics, what vitality of dramatic characterization! It is difficult for me to single out details. I can assure you that I have read all of it with the same growing interest. (Meerheimb, 1886, pp. V–VI)

What Gundlach calls "psychofashion," referring to Richard von Meerheimb's psychodramas, begins even before 1886. In fact, the first edition of *Monodramen* [Monodramas] appears in 1879, as *Monodramen neuer Form (Psycho-Dramen)* [Monodramas of a New Form (Psycho-dramas)] in Dresden, and reactions from the German press are varied.

The Viennese newspaper *Presse* [Press] of August 1, 1879, for example, spares no praise for the author: "That to which Meerheimb aspires and which he brilliantly shows to be possible, (...) is a concentrated drama, reduced to a single

character, and on top of that, he does not even act, but merely speaks, based on a living, compelling situation." "The poems"—the newspaper concludes—"thus fulfill what they promise; the reader or listener receives from them an authentic dramatic impression. For the orator, these constitute difficult, yet also unusually rewarding tasks; he throws himself into them and finds tragic and joyful pieces from which to choose" (Meerheimb, 1886, p. 332).

For their part, the *Süddeutsche Presse* [South German Press] and *Münchner Nachrichten* [Munich News] of October 3, 1879 comment, respectively: "We are here faced with poems and interpretations of prose that are absolutely original and highly influential," and "the author is captivating and witty in equal measure, in the field of the profoundly serious as well as the humorous" (p. 332). We find a similar reaction in the *Berlinen Börsen Zeitung* [Berlin Stock Exchange Newspaper] (No. 259, 1879) and the *Schlesische Presse* [Silesian Press] (No. 487, 1879). One sees in the work "as much a stimulating reading as suitable material for interpretation in private and public circles"; the other hails "ideas so novel and original" that "their repercussions will be felt in the circles of our people who are enthusiastic about that which is good and beautiful" (p. 332).

Coincidence or not, the term *monodrama* will reappear decades later, in the United States, now in the psychodramatic context as defined by Adam Blatner in his book, *Foundations of Psychodrama*:

> **Monodrama:** The protagonist plays all of the parts of the enactment. The advantage here is the access gained to the protagonist's viewpoint. It also requires no auxiliaries and may be part of individual therapy. A third advantage is that it guides the protagonist into broadening his perspective through role reversal. It is often used with the empty chair technique, and the protagonist moves physically into another seat when taking a different role. A disadvantage is the absence of the stimulation that can come from an auxiliary's behavior. Fritz Perls' technique of Gestalt Therapy used an adaptation of this technique. (Blatner, 2005, p. 246).

Moreno himself will use the concept, at the beginning of the 1953 edition of his masterpiece *Who Shall Survive?*, when he refers to the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard as someone who, following Socrates, had approached the "psychodramatic format":

> Two thousand years later Kierkegaard again heard the demon but he was hindered by private remorse, submerged by the imperatives of his private existence, the fear of losing the "I" in the "Thou" and an obsession with his own monodrama. It remained for me to hear and understand the demon more completely, and to bring the idea to a finish. (Moreno, 1953, pp. XXIII–XXIV)

In fact, the term monodrama appears in the German language long before Meerheimb used it. Dated from 1776, for example, the German publisher and Hispanist Friedrich Justin Bertuch had already published *Polyxena, ein lyrisches Monodrama* [Polyxena, a lyric monodrama] with music by the German composer Ernst Wilhelm Wolf. What characterizes Meerheimb's contribution with his "new form" appears to be the psychological phenomenon provoked by the performer in helping the listener to mentally construct, as if in the present moment, previously described scenes. It is surely for this reason that Meerheimb adds the compound term *Psycho-Dramas* to the title of his first edition of *Monodramen neuer Form*.

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In November 1892, the first issue of *Neue litterarische Blätter* [New Literary Sheets] appears in the city of Bremen. According to the introduction signed by "the Editor," the new journal has "the intention to devote itself, as the official organ of the 'Psychodrama Literary Society', to the promotion of the psychodramatic muse and to keep all members regularly informed about the dissemination of psychodrama." Regarding the initiative, the text informs us that "psychodrama, conceived by Richard von Meerheimb, is a new artistic creation which has found such numerous and enthusiastic friends that it seems entirely justified that an organ of its own should be devoted to the promotion of this type of poetry" (Hähnel, 1892, p. 1).

On page 3 of the same issue, it is Felix Zimmermann's turn to pen the article "What is a psychodrama?," which deserves to be reproduced, at least in part, for a better understanding of the concept developed by Meerheimb:

> The question "What is a psychodrama?" cannot be answered exhaustively in a few words. It is a completely new, unitary poetic form. Truth be told, it is a hybrid form of fundamental dramatic, epic, and lyrical elements, a drama in the simplest and most ideal implementation conceivable. It lacks any external apparatus, as the poems for performance are not written for the external sense of the listener but instead require the most intimate cooperation of the psyche being stimulated, in order for the listener to understand and feel this drama in all its refinement. But, it is precisely this purely spiritual essence of psychodrama that makes it possible for fantasy, which transcends time and space, to create in a few minutes a dramatic process that in reality lasts perhaps hours, driven by the spiritual waves of language and sound, with all the nuances and emotions of feeling. The psycho-playwright thus has a double task. In the center of an action articulated according to the dramatic rules, he places the hero of the psychodrama, through whose words and only through those words, must be reflected the words and actions of all the other characters

> with tangible expression. The external and ongoing action and reaction are thus brought to an unquestionable, spiritually visible clarity. But, secondly, the psycho-playwright allows a simultaneous expression of the inner motivation of the action, the hero's internal struggle, the solution of an internal problem, etc., in a deep psychological analysis. (Zimmermann, 1892, p. 3)

It is also worthwhile to keep in mind what Zimmermann calls the "fundamental laws of psychodrama," which he summarizes in three points and which, at least in the second aspect, will coincide with one of the elements proposed by Moreno, based on his "philosophy of the moment," the *hic et nunc* [here and now], as we shall see below:

> First, several characters participate in the action, as in a drama for the stage; second, the action unfolds as in drama in progressive development, in the present and with the active participation – and not mere description or narration – of the speaker; third, psychodrama lacks any stage representation and works immediately from spirit to spirit. (p. 3)

Whether or not one considers the psychodrama created by Meerheimb as a trendy movement, as Professor Gundlach does, the fact remains that the *Neue litterarische Blätter* were published at least until 1897, as shown by the library archives of the universities of Basel in Switzerland and Leipzig in Germany (Hähnel, 1892–1897).

As for the Literary Society of Psychodrama created in Bremen, despite the difficulties in obtaining data about it, it may not have been the only one of this genre. In 1894, the book *Seelenbilder* (Soul Images) came out in Strasbourg, with 15 poems by Karl Storck, preceded by "A Treatise on Psychodrama." At the end of his introduction, the author comments, "the literary society 'Psychodrama' of Berlin merits my particular gratitude, whose presidency I consider a great honor to be able to exercise. In the circle of this, in the social interaction of its members, I have found the stimuli from which these poems arose" (Storck, 1894, p. XXIII).

* * *

In an article on "Rilke's Psychodramas," to which we shall return in more detail later, however, Professor Howard Roman of Harvard University is of the opinion that it is "unlikely that there be two distinct organizations with the same unusual name and the same purpose" (Roman, 1944, p. 403). He supposes that, just as the journal *Neue litterarische Blätter* came to be published later in Berlin, it is possible that the same literary society of psychodrama in Bremen also moved to the German capital.

Be that as it may, in his "treatise," the president of the Berlin literary society confesses that initially he had been prepared to call his poems "psychodramas." Subsequently, however, it seemed to him "that the present attempts did not meet all the demands of the founder of psychodrama, although at the same time he saw that this instituted system of psychodrama was hardly ever followed very strictly by its own founder" (Storck, 1894, p. VII). Feeling the lack of a clearer definition of the new genre, he himself tries to contribute his vision to the subject:

> Psychodrama is not to be, as anyone can well infer from the grammatical formation of the word, the drama of a soul, but rather a drama for souls; that is to say that, in listening to or reading these poems, the psyche of the listener or reader must be excited to such an extent that he believes he is hearing or seeing a drama. Moreover, the name psychodrama is also justified by the fact that this poetry renounces some of the bodily tools that drama uses, mainly the mimicry and the staging, but in exchange, it supposes much higher demands of the listener's state of mind, of his fantasy.
>
> To this is added, as a third characteristic, that in psychodrama only one person speaks, the entire action must take place on the basis of the words of this single [character]. (Storck, 1894, pp. VIII–IX)

For Storck, this third point is the most important, as "it is the one that brings forth the new aspect of psychodrama: the psychological." He considers the need to awaken the listener's or reader's interest in this single character, and that this occurs, on the one hand, "in an optimal way, by placing this character himself in the action" and, on the other hand, "making it such that within himself he reaches the solution to a problem of the soul, which, by being disentangled psychologically, provides us at the same time with the motivation for the entire action" (Storck, 1894, pp. IX–X).

* * *

While Karl Storck was publishing *Seelenbilder*, his first book, another poet who had just thrown himself into literature, Rainer Maria Rilke, paid a visit to the creator of literary psychodrama, Richard von Meerheimb, in Dresden. At least, that is what Howard Roman assumes, in his 1944 article:

> Richard von Meerheimb, the father of psychodrama, was living in Dresden at the time (1894), (...) and we suppose that Rilke, enthusiastic about psychodrama as he must have been, visited the contemporary master of that form and the Dresden gallery on the same day, and in the search of psychodramatic material, picked for subject matter the first thing his eye came upon and liked: Murillo and the Leyden painters. (Roman, 1944, p. 409)

In addition to the psychodrama produced in 1894, in which he imagines the dramatic death of the famous Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Rilke writes a second one, published in the following year: *Die Hochzeitsmenuett* [The Wedding Minuet]. According to Roman, both were written in blank verse, that is, not in rhyme.

In his article, Roman also tries to contribute to clarify the concepts, stating that, "by definition, a psychodrama is the same as a monodrama." Going into details, he says:

> Monodrama at its simplest is nothing more than drama in monologue. At its most ambitious, however, it can assume that a number of persons other than the single actor are present on the stage, in which case the single actor indulges in one-sided dialogue with them, their words and actions being communicated to us through him. All scenery and props, like these unseen secondary characters, are also imaginary. (Roman, 1944, p. 402)

Regarding Meerheimb's works, Roman comments that, although "they have long been forgotten, these were extremely well known in his time and were presumably Rilke's models when he wrote the two short pieces in question." Meerheimb, he adds, "was the innovator and leader of the whole psychodrama-fashion" and, as proof of his popularity, Roman reports that the *Neuer Theater Almanach* [New Theater Almanac], "which annually devoted its hundreds of pages to records and statistics but never to the drama itself, reprinted a psychodrama of Meerheimb's called *Oktavia*," in 1894 (Roman, 1944, p. 402).

Incidentally, in the introduction to Rainer Maria Rilke's *Nine Plays*, which begins with *Murillo—A Psychodrama*, University of Illinois Professor Klaus Phillips confirms Roman's opinion:

> Later in the same year [1894], Rilke turned to psychodrama plays in which there is only one actor. Richard von Meerheimb, a popular writer of psychodramas during the latter part of the nineteenth century, became an example for the young Rilke. Rilke's "Murillo," based on the life of the Spanish painter, adheres to Meerheimb's principles, although he clearly adapts these principles to his own purpose. (Phillips, 1979, p. IX)

As an example, Phillips cites the scene of Murillo's death: "In contrast with the self-centered histrionics that characterize Meerheimb's characters in a comparable situation," Murillo's death scene is dominated "by an impassioned, yet restrained depiction of Christ on the cross" (Phillips, 1979, p. IX).

With that, Phillips comments, attention is diverted "from the difficult situation of Murillo's impending death to his attempt to depict the passion of Christ." In addition, he adds:

> Other details of Murillo's death seem to be Rilke's own invention. The biographical fact is that the Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682) died in the arms of a patron, with one of his sons and a pupil also present. But the primary significance of the play does not reside in its historical accuracy. Psychodrama has ignited in Rilke the idea of trying to represent inner life in the face of external experience, an idea that would remain with Rilke throughout all his future works. (Phillips, 1979, p. IX–X)

By way of illustration, it is worth reproducing the first stanza, as well as the last, of Rilke's first psychodrama, which can also be found, in German, in his book *Sämtliche Werke—Dritten Band—Jugendichte* [Complete Works – third volume – poems of youth], and which takes up less than four pages of the aforementioned book. Thus, the evocative power of those verses in the mind of the readers can be put to the test concretely, without further comments.

MURILLO
A PSYCHODRAMA
(Scene: a modest room in the strange house before whose door is found a stranger who has fainted).

Oh! That... that hurts! I can barely get up.
The attack... What kind of room? Where am I...?
Here... nobody?... My memory is blurred,
My head is heavy... and my pulse is throbbing.
Oh, I'm tired... Mists of a heavy gray are woven
Before my eyes. – Footsteps? – Do I hear well...?
A peasant?
Good friend, it is only with great difficulty
that I can remember the past hours.
How did it happen that...?
unknown people found me
at your door? Stiff, inert... as if dead...?
(*Pause)*
Look this way, friends! Ecce homo; observe,
It is He! Drink the chalice of passion, the bitter chalice,
for us! .....
You raise your hands in prayer...
You have understood my work...
I can die (Rilke, 1979, pp. 3, 6).

Rilke's second psychodrama, *Die Hochzeitsmenuett—Psychodrama* [The Wedding Minuet—Psychodrama], which also appears in the third volume of *Sämtliche Werke* [Complete Works], occupies nine pages and is part of his younger poems (Rilke, 1959, p. 101).

* * *

The "term psychodrama" was first introduced in the literature by Meerheimb; thus, to clarify, I reached out in writing to Zerka T. Moreno to get her interpretation. The following is her response to my inquiry.

> Moreno never spoke of that to me. However, his cultural milieu must have led him to all these sources. I think he would observe that these were "cultural conserves," as are all forms of creation formed as finished, not arising in the here and now. So, he would not categorize them any differently. In fact, he stated that his own books and films were cultural conserves, as they arose out of and represented past moments, frozen in time.
>
> He was concerned with the creator, not the products, although he said that Shakespeare was a forerunner of psychodrama understood as a cultural conserve form because any creation which is repeatable is no longer spontaneous. That term is limited to the first time it was created.
>
> He wrote that our culture does not sufficiently lend itself to spontaneous creation. That is how he wanted psychodrama to be a corrective.
>
> He wrote this in one of his earlier German books *Ave Creatore*. (…) (Z. T. Moreno, personal communication, November 29, 2013).

I found no trace of the German original of that title in any of the documents consulted, including the Harvard collection, but *Ave Creatore* does appear as the first book signed by Moreno in English (1931), inaugurating the journal *Impromptu,* edited by him in New York, in January 1931. In keeping with his religious beliefs based on his Romanian experience and strengthened during his youth in Vienna, as we shall see, Moreno brings back the vision of God the Creator again in the text, affirming:

> All the affirmations and denials of God, all His images, have revolved around this, the God of the second status, the God Who had reached recognition in the affairs of the universe, so to speak. But there is another status of God, which even as a symbol has been neglected, that is the status of God before the Sabbath, from the moment of conception, during the process of creating and evolving of the worlds and Himself.

> No matter how paradoxical it may sound, this status of God is much closer to mankind, as is a mother to her child during pregnancy than after separation from it, because it is not the perfected, unreachable existence that is painted before our eyes, but a growing, fermenting, actively forming, imperfect being, striving toward perfection and completion. (Moreno, 1931, p. 4)

For Moreno, "science and the new psychology, preceded by the great religions, have established in our civilizations the ideal of the sage as being the man who has reached a balance of perfection through intellectual supremacy." In other words, what he points out as a tendency is the preference for "the finished product, the human representation of the God image in its secondary state." Following that "preference for the second state as against to the first state in the Biblical myth," he argues, the same thing happens "in man's attitude toward himself, his arts, his morals, his forms of culture, society, and government" (Moreno, 1931, p. 4).

Without mentioning it explicitly, what Moreno criticizes in this article is the phenomenon of "cultural conserves," which he frequently touches upon in his texts, giving examples:

> The last stage of a work, the books in the libraries, the finished paintings and sculptures in the galleries and museums, the mercantile products of inventive ideas, the rigid standards, the ethical, psychological and physical formulae, fascinated man's imagination, became the idols around which everyone was to revolve (...). (Moreno, 1931, p. 4)

Moreno then discusses what he considers having happened to "the painter, the sculptor, the legislator to cultures and civilizations," who, "after their days of creation were over," forgot that "they had been slaves in Egypt," – "the meagre days of continuous efforts to produce." And, more than that, "they forgot the status of creation itself, its silences, its deserts, its imperfections, its hopelessness, its inferiorities." "They forgot"—he argues—"because they did not want to observe certain changes that had almost always taken place in the man creator himself. The work was finished and the creator of it seemed to be at an advantage compared with his various phases during evolution" (Moreno, 1931, pp. 4–5). Because of all that, he concludes:

> Our world needs a corrective, a glorification of the creative act, an asylum for the creator, a refuge for the thirsty and hungry souls who do not strive but for the silences and grandeurs of the moment, who in infinite modesty have dedicated their lives to the passing reality of the moment and detached themselves from the permanent glory of immortality. (Moreno, 1931, p. 5)

That corrective, as Zerka suggests, will be the proposal of the Morenian psychodramatic method that, contrary to the literary psychodrama of

Meerheimb, breaks with preconceived text and script and, as we shall see, will be based on the principles of the philosophy of the moment and on the fundamental concepts of spontaneity and creativity, among others, developed during his Viennese period.

* * *

In conclusion, there are at least two key questions that arise from reading this text, and they are worth addressing. The first comes from a basic comparison between the psychodramatic method developed by Meerheimb and the one proposed by Moreno. While the former presupposes prior preparation of a text to be subsequently read in front of an audience, who will perform the mental exercise of creating scenes, the latter is based on improvisation as a resource for creating scenes in action.

Although both approaches utilize theatrical manifestations, Meerheimb's approach focuses on the creation of a stage in which the speaker is the protagonist, providing the raw material for the audience's creation of mental scenarios. Morenian psychodrama, built on his theory of spontaneity and creativity, prioritizes the creative process of the protagonist and, eventually, the other participants during the session.

Regarding Moreno's use of the term "psychodrama," there is, of course, the hypothesis put forward by Professor Gundlach: "Moreno must have possibly stored Meerheimb's expression in his subconscious, only to later gift it back to the world, transformed." Someone may also think that Moreno simply appropriated the term, without giving any credit, or that he coined the term independently.

I do not think either of these possibilities can be affirmed with any certainty. However, one of the clues to solving the mystery leads us to the autobiography of actress Elisabeth Bergner. Commenting on the presence of the young Moreno as her private tutor, Bergner recounts, for example:

> Thus, with Moreno a new era begins. The ease and speed with which the schoolwork was accomplished was soon no longer the most important. I was given poems to learn. And not just "The Bell" and "The Hostage" and such things from the school reader. But the wildest, most beautiful "unknown" poems. (Bergner, 1978, p. 14)

Among the authors mentioned by Bergner are Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Matthias Claudius, and Rainer Maria Rilke, the latter being the author of his two aforementioned youth "psychodramatic" poems. It is true that there is no mention of Rilke in Moreno's autobiography, but it is worth recalling a memory he noted about one of his teachers, from his Viennese time:

> I particularly remember a young teacher of literature. He couldn't have been teaching very long. I really made him feel insecure before

> the class. The more I diminished his authority, the more helpless he became. Later on, I realized that he was probably a very able teacher, perhaps one of the best teachers I had in Gymnasium. He took a genuine interest in us. (…) This teacher tried to encourage me. The more he encouraged me, the more insolent I became towards him. He tried to befriend me because he cared about me, but also because he was unsure of himself. He never fought back. I don't remember how the other teachers responded to my insolence. He was the only one I remember from those days. If nothing else, he certainly helped me to sharpen my wits. (Moreno, 2019, p. 134)

By connecting Bergner's reference to Rilke's poems with Moreno's expressed preference for his literature teacher, the possibility that he may have known both texts by the Austro-German poet appears quite plausible. At present, that is the closest that the known evidence allows us to arrive at as an answer to that enigma, which not even Zerka herself was able to unravel.

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