

PSYCHODRAMATICS—THE GENEALOGY OF A CLINICAL MODALITY

ANDREW W. MEZURECKY, M.S.

United States International University, San Diego, California

The central purpose of this paper will be to trace in a genealogical manner certain archaic forms of the psychodramatic modality preceding the discovery of the contemporary psychodramatic method by J. L. Moreno. The resultant focus of this research will be a consideration of several phenomenological constructs which are integral to our general clinical understanding of the human neurosis and specifically relative as pillars supporting at least the intuitive theoretical base of archaic forms of psychodramatic treatment. We will observe the genealogy of psychodramatics proper, beginning with the ancient Greeks through the psychiatric tradition of Western Europe of the 1700s and finally ethnological work which has been done in this century related to certain Indian tribes located in the continental United States. We are approaching certain methods which are distant cousins of the clinical method which was created by Jacob Moreno, analogous to the fact that although the Australopithecine was in some sense of the word 'man' (Tobias 1973), we could not equate this creature in the completely dimensional sense to the modern day homo sapiens. We must consider man as a trans-phenomenal creature who in antiquity and throughout the ages has understood in some part of his being the dictum which it took the genius of Moreno to express—"act yourself as you never were so that you may begin to be what you might become. Make it happen. Be your own inspiration, your own playwright, your own actor, your own therapist and finally your own creator" (Moreno 1971).

The realm of phenomenology has immense heuristic value especially in the clinical setting. When we talk about man being free and the creator of his destiny we are not only following the essence of psychodrama, but are also in direct harmony with the science of phenomenology. It is of specific interest to be noted here that the "ek-static" and intentional dimensions of the human personality are always in full operation, as has been known at least peripherally from the Greeks onwards. Following from this as clinicians, we must pay heed to the discovery of phenomenology in that "our body is both subject and object. Because of this paradoxical nature, it can serve as a bridge between consciousness and the world. It puts consciousness into the world" (Mann, Kreyche 1966). So we see here a dynamic which serves as an important antecedent to Heidegger's concept of "ek-stase." The focal point

here being that in terms of dimension the ek-static way man enmeshes himself in the world is the basis of his freedom within the world. Speaking phenomenologically, it is also under the motivation of the human feeling which impels man to act as himself in the world, which is the healthy expression of being, in its intentional character. The genius of Brentano and Husserl has greatly enhanced our understanding of intentionality especially as to the dynamic way which consciousness interacts with objects (Gurwitsch 1966). I have included this section on phenomenology insofar as it is integral in terms of putting my research as to the genealogy of the psychodramatic method into a cohesive and contemporarily relevant investigation—the emphasis being that in all forms of psychodramatics to be explored, the ek-static and intentional dimensions are present.

Let us now turn our attention to one of the earliest forms of theatre which may be called therapeutic, namely the theatre as created by the Greeks.

Greek theatre was highly public and as such therapeutic in its nature. The most elemental reason for this is simply that a great many of the dramatic actors were chosen from the general populace—

the nature of the chorus, for a long time the most important element in the drama, was drawn from the public at large. The average citizen might have been a spectator one year and a participant the next. (Arnott 1971)

In so much as the Greek actor was a man of the everyday world with its gratuities and agonies so also was this reflected in his dramatic work. The audience's reaction was anything but passive; it was continually emotionally involved. Because of the impact of the actors and its geographic location the audience could observe the actors and itself. As the audience was aware of itself in a dimensional context it became a living breathing whole. In many senses it was an active partner in the Greek drama, commenting, supporting and interjecting its presence into the drama's microcosmic representation of man's dilemma of existence in the world. From this we can plainly see that the Greeks were a lively audience and their general catharsis came from the *active* expression of their feelings during any particular performance. I would venture to say that there was an expressed aspect of social learning to be obtained from attendance at these theatrical performances:

In Lucian's dialogue Solon tells Anacharsis that the Athenians educate their sons by taking them to tragedies and comedies and showing them examples of virtue and vice, so as to teach them what to imitate and what to avoid. (Haigh 1889)

In congruence with what we have seen so far as observers of the Greeks, we must turn for a brief moment to an account of intra-psychic nature from a

contemporary of ancient Greek theatre, namely, Aristotle, elucidating the basic purpose of tragedy:

It is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the audience; and to arouse this pity and fear in such a way as to effect that special purging off and relief (catharsis) of these two emotions which is the characteristic of tragedy. (Cooper 1913)

So that we can see a specific understanding of the relationship of catharsis to human action, we must turn to this final statement which gives us a direct understanding of this concept in the Greek theatre as stated by Aristotle:

For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an *action* and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action not a quality. Dramatic action, therefore is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all; again without action there cannot be a tragedy. (Butcher 1911)

The next rung which must be considered in terms of this genealogy of the psychodramatic method is still within the parameter of western European civilization but at a much later date, namely the work of the eighteenth century German psychiatrist, Johannes Christian Reil (1759-1813), who is credited with originating the term 'psychiatrist' (Eaton, Peterson 1969). The relevance of phenomenology in the work of Reil is not inferred but directly expressed—"Reil was a psychological phenomenologist for whom the modern concepts of Ganzheit, totality, unity, concentricity were basic elements of scientific interpretation" (Harms 1960). That Reil was an early phenomenologist and forerunner of the psychodramatic method is clearly expressed in Reil's major work—*Rhapsodien ueber die Anwendung der psychischen Cur-Methoden auf Geisteszerruettungen*—

each mental institution ought to have a specially arranged *theatre* with the necessary machinery to present various settings. The employees of the institutions should be trained to play various *roles*—that of judge, an executor, physician or an angel who comes from heaven or the dead who has risen from his grave—all concepts which might play a serious role in the mental status of this or that patient and what might impress his *imagination* therapeutically. Such a theatre should be able to present scenes from a prison, the lion's den, a place of execution, and an operating room. There would be Don Quixote knighted, imaginary pregnant women freed from their load, foals skinned, repenting sinners absolved in a ceremonial play. In short, such a *therapeutic theatre* could aid individual cases in a variety of diseases, awaken the fantasy and the speculation, call for the

most contradictory emotions such as fear, fright, astonishment, anxiety or mental calm, according to what may help the patient to eliminate his fixed ideas or his misdirected emotions. (Reil 1803)

Within this same framework Reil reckons: Why could there not be written real plays for the purpose of the work with mental patients, to be performed by the patients themselves. Some may be acting and some watching. The *roles* would be distributed according to the individual *therapeutic* needs. The fool, for instance, could be given a role making him aware of the foolishness of his way of behaving and so on. (Reil 1803)

Now that we have seen Reil's contribution to the evolution of the psychodramatic method, let us now move from the field of psychiatry to ethnology in our study of this particular genealogy.

The Pomo Indians of California have within this century in their particular medical societies shown us, specific techniques which in a crude form represent the dimensions of a therapeutic modality which is something similar to psychodramatics as has been previously discussed in relationship to the Greek theatre and the theoretical work of Johannes Reil.

The Pomos have a concept of disease which is very interesting in view of the fact that its genesis is not imprinted from anything of western medicine or psychiatry. The Pomo concept of mental illness is based on two basic principles—"it becomes apparent that the Pomo classifies his disorders as those 'from the outside' and those 'from the inside.' Those of the first sort are in the main the frightening cases; those rooted in the fear which sight of a ghost or monster raises in the beholder, and they are treated by reproducing as nearly as possible the terrifying vision. This process of the doctor is explained as a device to identify the spirit, which may then be implored by prayers to desist from haunting the sick man. At the same time it is regarded as a cure in itself founded on quite conscious Pomo psychological theories—seeing a thing again takes it off your mind, it is said, and one Indian doctor asserted that he could cure all the people in the State insane hospital if he were allowed to treat them on this principle." (Freeland 1923)

It must be mentioned in passing that the Zuni Indian also utilized an adaptive form of psychodrama in the practice of their tribal medicine, which involved the patient as an active participant and an integral part of the healing process (Stevenson 1901). So also in the medical practices of the Navajo, an element of psychodrama was utilized in the cure of hallucinations and syndromes involving fear and anxiety (Matthews 1902). The psychodramatic method was specifically expressed by the Navajo in their emphasis of group treatment and recreating through the use of props and role-playing the patients particular mental malady.

In summation it has been my expressed purpose to give a genealogical account of the psychodramatic method as recorded in modern and ancient

history drawing from the fields of drama, psychiatry, ethnology, and phenomenology showing that man left to his own design can and will create those clinical modalities which activate his phenomenological insight and potential, which has reached its culmination in the genius of Jacob Moreno and his creation of the formal theory and method of psychodrama.

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