

# **The Love and Marriage of Psychodrama and Drama Therapy**

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Psychodrama sprung directly from the head of Viennese psychiatrist and visionary, J. L. Moreno, in the early 1920s. But it wasn't entirely a virgin birth. It was the lovechild of Moreno's dalliances with theatre and medicine, religion, psychology, and sociology. In the early 1940s, psychodrama developed further as Moreno partnered with Zerka Toeman, who arrived in the United States from Holland to admit her sister to Moreno's Beacon, New York, psychiatric facility. They married in 1949 and nurtured their beloved child on the principles of creativity and spontaneity, settling in the gentle town of Beacon. Over time, the growing child, psychodrama, migrated back to Europe and beyond, taking root in many diverse cultures. Eventually, in 1950, psychodrama arrived in Turkey when Moreno lectured to Istanbul University's Medical Faculty at the Department of Psychiatry. One young psychiatrist, Dr. Abdülkadir Özbek, was in attendance, fell in love with the beautiful being, no longer a child, and introduced her to professionals in Turkish medicine, psychology, social work, and education. The love fest has persisted over the years, yielding many offspring.

In 1982, Dr. Özbek initiated major psychodrama training in Turkey under the guidance and supervision of German psychodramatist, Dr. Greta Leutz. In 1984, the trainings moved from Ankara to the Bergama (Pergamon) Aesclepion, symbolizing a connection to the healing theatre. The Aesclepion at Bergama is one of the most intact healing centers in the Hellenic world, rivaling those in Delphi and Epidavros in Greece. Of great interest is the design of these ancient centers, with the theatre in close proximity to the temples and hospitals. In the case of Delphi, the theatre stands between the temple, where celebrants consulted the oracle of Apollo for spiritual

guidance, and the sports stadium, where athletes competed in contests of physical strength and endurance.

The group psychotherapy and psychodrama congresses are alive and well, the 38th being held in 2013 in the ancient Aesclepion, linking traditional forms of healing with contemporary practices of group psychotherapy and psychodrama.

In 2009, for the first time, the congress organizers invited a drama therapist to address the psychodrama community and a potential new love relationship was ignited to be set ablaze again in June 2013.

The relationship between drama therapy and psychodrama, though stable, is marred by infidelities. In this talk, I will discuss the infidelities and point to commonalities that may help build a stronger union between the two beings that can bode well for building a community of drama for change.

## **DRAMA THERAPY**

The father of drama therapy is most likely the great spirit/healer who goes by many names and no names. From my perspective, this healer is not a father at all but a mother, like Athena, the goddess of wisdom, or Gaia and Isis, both earth goddesses, or like Aphrodite, the goddess of love, or Psyche, the goddess of the soul. Thus drama therapy, a mongrel in itself, has many progenitors.

Another is the shaman. I have written at length about the shamanic roots of drama therapy (Landy, 2008), looking especially at the dramatic performances of shamans. As physicians heal through consulting diagnostic and pharmaceutical manuals, and through poking and measuring the body and its secretions, shamans heal through storytelling, song and dance,

through trance and incantation, through symbolic journeys from the natural to the supernatural worlds, mediated by the powers of the imagination. Their operating rooms exist in liminal spaces between heaven and earth, imagination and reality, person and performance.

Another mother of drama therapy is the theatre. After all, drama therapy is unique among psychotherapies in its aesthetic form and substance. In theatre actors play roles, tell stories in role, and embody archetypal themes. Through their performances, actors induce the great cathartic responses of pity and fear, pleasure and rage, forgetfulness and memory upon willing viewers who participate vicariously in the theatrical bloodbaths and love feasts. Theatre itself was born out of religion and involved ritual actions to appease the gods and assure the community of bountiful harvests and success in war and love. The theatre of ritual is clearly evident in Eastern forms of Indian kathakali dance, Chinese opera, and Japanese kabuki, among many others. In the Bergama and Greek Aesclepians, there is evidence of ancient seekers of health engaging as actors and audience members in the drama as part of their cure.

Psychoanalysis is yet another mother of drama therapy. It was Freud who challenged neurologists and psychologists to redirect their attention from the body to the mind and to understand the profound influence of unconscious experience upon thought and behavior. And beyond Freud, his dangerous colleagues broke rank, asserting the primacy not only of the word in healing the troubled mind, but also of the image, the body, the metaphor, and eventually, the dramatic action of the actor. Beyond Freud, psychoanalysts came to respect the healing power of enactment and performance, viewing the drama of transference and counter-transference as another form of dramatic engagement and healing.

So drama therapy is the child of couch and stage, of art and music and movement, of Freud and Jung and Reich, of body, mind, and soul, of Asclepion and hospital, of mirror images and mirror neurons, of play and work, of rehearsal and performance.

Like two young lovers in search of relationship, drama therapy and psychodrama find each at different stages in their lives. Psychodrama is the elder by some 40 years, similar to the age difference between Zerka and J. L. Psychodrama is well traveled, smart, sure of itself, even a little cocky and arrogant, in the image of its founder. It knows what it wants and follows its own script. It is charismatic and confident. Although it is connected to the theatre, most of its practitioners are not actors. They are directors, and in their relationships, they like to direct the action. They are skilled in making their clients cry and laugh, scream and dance. Although they know about the power of metaphor, they often ask their clients to reenact stories that are real, but in need of alternative endings or even beginnings. They don't accept people as they are. They expect people to change. They know that change is good and that to change people need to discover a greater sense of creativity and spontaneity.

Of course, there are many exceptions to these generalizations. In Europe, for example, psychodrama is a more experimental form, often proceeding through metaphor, play, fantasy, and imagination. In fact, throughout many years, the Bergamo congress has featured the work of two psychodramatists, Maurizio Gasseau and Jörg Burmeister, who work in the realm of the imagination and invite participants to engage in an aesthetic process that often obscures the boundaries between classical psychodrama and drama therapy.

Drama Therapy, however, is younger, less known, and therefore enticing in the way of an innocent. The stamps in its passport are appearing more frequently, but it has a long way to go to rival the frequent flyer miles of its elder. It is not as arrogant, but has the fire and power of youth.

It loves its mistakes and it loves its existential moment of invention and discovery. It can seem a little new age or indulgent in its flirtation with transpersonal experience and shamanism, but it finds its center in the art form of the theatre. It loves Shakespeare and applies his plays to healing in prisons, hospitals, and schools. It loves to improvise poetry and dance, and loves to help others dramatize their stories. It loves love, like the young Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's famous play. It loves the fact that it comes from a broken home, with many parents and grandparents, and sometimes looks askance at those families that are of heteronormatively constructed.

The two potential lovers have met on a number of occasions, mostly at conferences. Over the years their parents have tried to fix them up and encourage them to get to know one another better before they become lovers, for they feared if they assumed the roles of lovers before friends, things wouldn't work out so well.

And so they flirted, occasionally crossing the line as new lovers sometimes do.

When first meeting, they were excited to learn how much they shared. Both had a hunger to act out, to express themselves, to seek peak experiences, to dance the night away, and to be romantic. They both loved beaches and mountains. They both loved exotic locales and sensual pleasures. They both loved to warm themselves in the winter cold in front of roaring fireplaces. And they especially loved healing centers and spas.

And so they disobeyed their parents and forgot about the friendship part. And in their haste to make love and embrace their commonalities, they lost sight of their differences and so, over time, they drifted away from one another, not really understanding the other sufficiently to reunite as equals. Their infidelities were of the usual kind-flirting or sleeping around with appealing faces they would meet at conferences and lectures in medicine, psychology, social

work, education, theatre, dance. These lovers were close enough to be desirable, far enough away to be safe.

As a parent of sorts of Drama Therapy, I'd like to take a moment to point out some of the differences and say that I believe that a deeper, more erotic love can occur if the lovers are innocent enough to play together and wise enough to live within the contradictions of their differences as players.

Differences:

1. Age: Psychodrama is almost 90 years old. Drama Therapy is barely 40 years
2. Approach/Technique: Classical psychodrama, particularly as practiced in the United States, is a fairly fixed approach, based in several techniques, such as role-reversal, doubling, and mirroring. Drama Therapy has developed several different approaches, many with their own concepts, theories and practices. Approaches include role method, developmental transformations, and narradrama.
3. Performance: Drama Therapy sometimes moves from process to product, from improvisation to performance. Performance in Drama Therapy is called Therapeutic Theatre. Psychodrama is primarily about process and does not generally move into performance as such.
4. Family dynamics: One set of parents, Zerka and J.L., for psychodrama. Several parents for drama therapy. Examples include the single parenting of several pioneers in the field such as Sue Jennings in the United Kingdom and David Read Johnson in the United States, as well as collaboration between, for example, psychoanalysis and drama, narrative therapy and drama.

5. Sources: Psychodrama is based in Moreno's critique of psychoanalysis as well as his critique of the cultural conserve as found in early twentieth-century society and theatre. Drama Therapy is based in ancient healing practices, modern performance theory, educational and applied theatre, and an acknowledgement of the contributions of psychoanalysis and the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism.

6. Emotion and distance: Although both forms work through a spectrum of emotion and distance, psychodrama often leads to overt expression of feelings as clients engage directly with real dilemmas in their lives. Drama Therapy, working primarily through metaphor, does not necessarily engage overt emotional release, but, as in the theatre, seeks to help clients discover a balance of aesthetic distance. Thus, psychodrama encourages less aesthetic distance; drama therapy encourages more.

7. Relationship to the art form of theatre: Psychodrama in practice is not directly related to the theatre. Drama therapy is intimately related to the theatre in its methods and theory, in its training and research. Drama therapy works mostly through metaphor. Psychodrama does not necessary work through metaphor, but is more reality-based.

8. Theory and research: In Drama Therapy there is a greater engagement of theory and research as there is a greater attachment to academic education.

Psychodrama education is primarily through private institutes. The role theory of Moreno is not fully developed and the research is not as strong as the clinical practice.

As to commonalities:

1. Both drama therapy and psychodrama are action approaches to psychotherapy. They occur in present time, in the existential encounter of human beings.
2. Both circumvent a purely cognitive, verbal approach to psychological healing.
3. Both draw upon the life of the imagination and work through a confluence of mind, body, and spirit.
4. Both work through role and story, the common elements of human expression.
5. Both work through a spectrum of emotion and distance, helping clients discover optimal forms of balance.
6. Both are playful in nature and work within a play space that is qualitatively different from everyday reality.
7. Both attempt to harness creativity and to enhance spontaneity through a creative process.
8. Both are not just psychological, focusing upon the mind of an individual, but also social, cultural, and spiritual, focusing upon the relationship of individuals to societies, cultures, and objects of worship.
9. Both are parts of greater wholes, which can be action psychotherapy, alternative psychotherapy, holistic healing, creative arts or expressive therapy, or applied forms of theatre.
10. Both do not profess to know the truth or the way, but point to the process and the varied paths of embarking, to the mystery of self and to the relationship between personal and transpersonal aspects of being.

As the lovers get to know and accept one another better through their similarities and differences, the relationship is ready to move forward. True love, as both psychodramatists and



drama therapists tell us, happens in action, in presence, in encounter. Lovers ask their beloved: "Tell me you love me." Certainly the poets and singers give lovers a language of love, which they use on good days to communicate their feelings toward their beloved. And yet, lovers also implore: "Don't tell me. Show me." They know very well that without action, the words ring hollow. Love happens in demonstration like this, rather than in description- like that.

In preparing my talk for the amphitheatre of the Aesclepion in Bergama, I searched for a love poem by a Turkish poet to read to a Turkish-speaking audience. I could find very little of interest to my Western mind. Finally, I came to Rumi, a 13th-century Persian mystical poet who lived his last years in the Turkish city of Konya. I had a hard time with the spiritual, metaphorical language until "Like This," originally written in Persian. Somewhere near discovered the poem, discover of my talk, just before I was to read the poem in English, my translator at the ready to render the poem line by line into Turkish, I decided to perform the work asked the translator to read the poem in Turkish first, then approached the apron of the stage gingerly, as close as I could get to the audience. The performance felt awkward, and I was sweating profusely in the hot afternoon sun. Near the end, when I uttered the word, "Hu," I let something in, a spontaneity, an unknown presence. For a moment, I was able to feel the sense of place and time and otherness and mystery. The word sprung to life in my body. It was not a word that came out but a sound, which I uttered twice, the second time letting it sit in the air for a moment that felt endless.

Following the talk, I felt very vulnerable, as if I did something wrong. An older Turkish woman approached me from the crowd and asked if I knew the meaning of "Hu." "No," I responded. "You chanted it as if you knew," she said.

"In the Sufi tradition, it is an invocation of the divine. It means: 'He who is?'"

"Is what?" I wondered. And then I didn't.

*Like This*

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmi

If anyone asks you  
how the perfect satisfaction  
of all our sexual wanting will look, lift your face  
and say,

Like this.

If anyone wants to know what "spirit" is,  
or what "God's fragrance" means,  
lean your head toward him or her.  
Keep your face there close.

Like this.

When someone quotes the old poetic image  
about clouds gradually uncovering the moon,  
slowly loosen knot by knot the strings  
of your robe.

Like this.

If anyone wonders how Jesus raised the dead,  
don't try to explain the miracle.

Kiss me on the lips.

Like this. Like this.

When someone asks what it means  
to "die for love," point  
here.

If someone asks how tall I am, frown  
and measure with your fingers the space  
between the creases on your forehead.

This tall.

The soul sometimes leaves the body, then returns.

When someone doesn't believe that,  
walk back into my house.

Like this.

When lovers moan,  
they're telling our story.

Like this.

I am a sky where spirits live.  
Stare into this deepening blue,  
while the breeze says a secret.

Like this.

When someone asks what there is to do,  
light the candle in his hand.

Like this.

How did Joseph's scent come to Jacob?

Huuuuu.

How did Jacob's sight return?

Huuuu.

A little wind cleans the eyes.

Like this.

When Shams comes back from Tabriz,  
he'll put just his head around the edge  
of the door to surprise us

Like this.

## REFERENCE

Landy, R J. (2008). *The couch and the stage: Integrating words and action in psychotherapy*. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson.