As early as 1803, J. C. Reil (who coined the term ‘psychiatry’) connected the phenomenon of dissociated personalities with a similar occurrence that is manifest in a certain type of normal dreams: “The actors appear, the roles are distributed; of these, the dreamer takes only one that he connects with his own personality. all the other actors are to him as foreign as strangers, although they and all their actions are the creation of the dreamer’s own fantasy. One hears of people speaking in foreign languages, admires the talent of a great orator, is astounded by the profound wisdom of a teacher who explains to us things of which we do not remember ever having heard.” (Ellenberger 1994, 146-147) Reil proposed that therapeutic theatres be built in hospitals for those who suffered mental distress and scenes reflecting their delusions be played out for their benefit. In this he was influenced by Goethe.

At the end of a century which began with the publication of Freud’s “The Interpretation of Dreams” and Strindberg’s “A Dream Play” (Casson, 1997) the World Congress for Psychotherapy in Vienna will this summer (1999) be considering Myth, Dream and Reality. Dramatherapists and psychodramatists will be contributing to the Congress and this article reflects on the theory and practice of Dreamwork in these related creative action methods of psychotherapy.

It is to Peter Slade, the founder of dramatherapy in the U.K., that the credit for first using drama to work therapeutically with dream material must be given. Between 1937 - 9 Slade worked with Dr. Kraemer, a Jungian psychotherapist, using drama to complement therapy. He reports enabling a client to make progress in his therapy with Kraemer by using “drama action work” to “break the dream”, enabling the client to access significant, forgotten material. (Slade, 1995, 262)

In 1954, Slade wrote:
“I have found that children who suffer from nightmares can be helped to face their fears through play, and that the dreams may disappear afterwards.” (Slade, 1980, 343)

J. L. Moreno, the creator of psychodrama, also developed a psychodramatic method of dreamwork but it was not until 1951 that he published “Fragments from the Psychodrama of a Dream” a verbatim transcript of a
session. Commenting on the session Moreno likens the dream itself to an inner theatre: in psychodrama the inner is externalised so it can be worked on therapeutically. He writes: “He is encouraged to re-dream the dream, to continue the dream on stage, and to end it in a fashion which appears more adequate to him, or brings him to a better control of the latent dynamics upsetting him.” (reprinted in Fox, 1987, 200; see end note on the date of this material.) Moreno’s ideas had been developing since his early period in Vienna: at some time between 1912 - 14 Moreno met Freud at one of his lectures (about the analysis of a telepathic dream) and said to him, “Well, Dr. Freud, I start where you leave off....You analysed their dreams, I try to give them courage to dream again.” (Marineau, 1989, 30)

Zerka Moreno writes of the psychodrama technique: “Instead of telling the dream, the patient re-enacts it. He takes his position in bed, warming up to the sleep situation. When he is able to reconstruct the dream, he rises from the bed and represents the dream in action, using auxiliary egos to enact the role of the dream characters. This technique further makes use of retraining the patient, giving him the opportunity to “change” his dream and re-direct his dream pattern.” (Moreno Z., 1975, 7)

Dreams can inspire creative living: in 1964 it was a dream of drama in a hospital that led Marian Lindkvist to establish the Sesame training in drama/movement therapy in London, developing the work of Slade and informed by Laban and Jung’s ideas and practices. (Pearson, 1996, 52)

C. G. Jung has influenced the development of dramatherapy work with dreams. “For Jung (1968), the dream embodies archetypes of the collective unconscious. Through an analysis of these archetypes, one comes to know the central issues in his own life... In working with the dream, Jung focused upon the immediate context of the dreamer’s life, viewing the imagery, first through the short lens of the present, then through the longer one of the universal and timeless... Using the method of active imagination, he would often have patients express their imagery through drawing and movement.” (Landy, 1986, 156.)

Fritz Perls who developed Gestalt Therapy was influenced by Moreno’s method. Perls conceived the dream as “the dramatic representation of the
roles of self. In working with the dream, Perls shuns all analysis, moving instead into the technique of dramatisation. The client in Gestalt therapy acts out his dream in order to reclaim the separate, split off parts. For Perls, every object in the dream is a part of the self that can be reintegrated through a process of enactment.” (Landy, 1986, 157.)

**DRAMATHERAPISTS ON DREAMWORK:**

**Robert Landy** synthesises the ideas of Freud, Moreno, Jung and Perls:

“...we can conceive of the dreamworld as an altered state of consciousness that contains repressed elements from an individual’s past, archetypes from the collective past of mankind, and split-off parts of the self reflecting one’s present state of being. Further, we can see the dream as pointing to the future, to the hopes, wishes, and fantasies of the dreamer. Adding a more theatrical notion, the dreamworld can be seen as a stage containing sets, props, costumes, colors, and characters...In working with dreams the dramatherapist can begin by asking the client to reconstruct his dreamworld...with objects representing shapes, settings, characters in the dream.” (Landy, 1986,157) This can be done on a table, in a sand tray or on the floor. Landy then suggests, following Moreno, that members of the group can play these roles and the dream be worked on through group enactment.

A dream can first be told and re-enacted by the group with the dreamer in the audience, as in Playback Theatre, or the dreamer can enter her dream and role reverse with each element of the dream thus enabling other members of the group to take the roles more accurately (the psychodrama procedure). The dreamer can then become producer/director and alter the dream at will bringing in new characters or re-entering the action when she wishes to make a change. Masks could also be used to represent elements of the dream.

**Sue Jennings** echoes Moreno’s idea of dreaming: “All of us dream in dramatic form, as though it were a small theatre that is personal to us, playing and re-playing the dramas that, for whatever reason, we need to see.” (Jennings, 1990, 17)

She states: “Dramatherapists work with dream material, making it possible for the private dramas to be enacted and expanded rather than interpreted.” (Jennings, 1990, 18)
Brenda Rawlinson provides a sophisticated exposition of Jungian dramatherapy in her chapter in Dramatherapy Clinical Studies (Mitchell, 1996, 151 - 178). She describes her dreamwork with clients using sand play. She confirms Jennings’ stance against interpretation:
“Staying with the not knowing would appear to be a powerful requirement when working with the dream, since it would appear that the ego does not initiate or control the dream. The quality of the dream moves us away from the sole perspective of ego-consciousness, encouraging a creative and playful approach. In order to do this we need to look at the dream with an imaginal eye. In this manner we can suspend an over-dependence on only one type of logic, that which has a tendency to over-control. Freud’s very valuable work led us into an interpretive approach, while this has a place, there can be a real danger of fixing the image. This does not allow the imagination to shift, deepen or move the image on towards new possibilities.”
(Mitchell, 1996, 153)
I have written elsewhere about the significance of discoveries about the differing functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain and their implications for dramatherapists. (Casson, 1998, 12-15)
“In his recent book “Emotional Intelligence” Daniel Goleman differentiates two aspects of the mind: the rational and emotional. What he goes on to say has important implications for dramatherapists:
“The logic of the emotional mind is associative; it takes elements that symbolize a reality, or trigger a memory of it, to be the same as that reality. That is why similes, metaphors, and images speak directly to the emotional mind, as do the arts - novels, film, song, theatre, opera.....This logic of the heart - of the emotional mind - is well-described by Freud in his concept of “primary process” thought; it is the logic of religion and poetry, psychosis and children, dream and myth (as Joseph Campbell put it, “Dreams are private myths; myths are shared dreams”).
Cox/Theilgaard writes: “Metaphoric language has far greater possibilities for influencing the unconscious than logical, informative language.” (Cox and Theilgaard, 1994, 223). They go on to say “Images are closer to the inner centre, whereas words are closer to the voice of the ego.” (Cox and Theilgaard, 1994, 255.) Jung believed that images were the way the self communicated with the ego and there is some evidence that the right brain is more active during dream sleep.”
(Cox and Theilgaard, 1994, 215)”
(Casson, 1998, 14)
Dramatherapists, while working to strengthen the ego in vulnerable clients, draw on the archetypal energies and wisdom of the Self in the alchemical dream theatre of the therapeutic container.

**Alida Gersie** gives a clinical illustration of working with a child:

“Small children constantly dream of monsters catching them or coming towards them, with the child powerless to resist...it is very helpful for children to invent endings to such fearful dreams which empower them. We usually find a heroic character admired by the child, preferably one with the capacity to fly or to paralyse the monster in some way. Through play or story making we invent a powerful ending for the dream in which the monster is somehow contained.

**Case Example:**
T, aged 5, dreamt of a green slimy monster who trundled toward her as she was trapped against a wall. We decided that at the moment he got to her she would turn into Super Ted and fly away to land on top of the wall where she could shout rude things at the monster below. We talked about this fantasy, drew the monster, enacted the new dream. Once she had been able to incorporate this new ending into her dream, the dream stopped.

It is important never to kill such a dream monster because if the child again dreams of the monster there is a sense of the all powerful nature of the beast. The strategies are for containing the monster or escaping to fight another day makes the beast’s re-appearance less fearful. The child has strategies to cope.” (Gersie, 1996, 185)

Dramatherapists work in the chaotic flow of images and metaphors: dramatherapy is a method of dreaming whilst awake. Dramatherapists do not interpret dreams but empower the client to creatively continue and resolve the dream. Should the client interpret the dream that is supported and explored, as appropriate.

**PSYCHODRAMATISTS ON DREAMWORK:**

In the psychodrama literature there are surprisingly few references to work with dreams. The classic Morenian technique is to start with the protagonist settling down to sleep and to visualise the dream. (Fox, 1987, 139, 186) Moreno and Kipper both suggest a procedure that seems very like hypnotic induction: a guided fantasy led by the director, suggesting the person is settling down to sleep and remembering the dream. I do not regard this as
entirely necessary. The client may simply relax and recall the dream. Moreno stressed the value of setting the scene of the bedroom: such scene setting may well reveal valuable material in context and enable the protagonist to get into the role of dreamer. (He even asks “What are you wearing in bed? Is this how you lie? Are you alone in the bed?”) Once the dream is recalled it is then re-enacted, the protagonist role reversing with each element of the dream so that auxiliaries are enabled to take the roles and re-create the dream which may then be viewed as if in a mirror or with the protagonist actively involved. The dream can then be extended or reworked. Moreno also offered analysis and interpretation (see Fox, 1987, 196, 199) though he stressed that these were best achieved through action, the insights emerging through the re-enactment.

**Goldman and Morrison** report success in re-training nightmares:
“...the individual enacts the nightmare as it is dreamed and then re-enacts it in a new and more positive way. We have had success in re-training recurring nightmares of Vietnam veterans who previously were unable to divest themselves of the horrors of their wartime experiences.”
(Goldman and Morrison 1984, 25)

In my own practice working with a psychotic patient who complained of a recurring nightmare we re-enacted the nightmare and then gave him the power to change it, satisfying his act hunger which he had been powerless to fulfil in the paralysed, petrified dream role. He rescued his dog from the fire and confronted his father. The nightmare did not recur.

Kipper states that the main purpose of psychodramatic dreamwork is “to train the dreamer to dream better.” (Kipper, 1986, 199) Through this dream training the person is “taught to positively change the ending or the nature of his or her disturbing dreams.” (Kipper, 1986, 200)

Blatner states the aim of dream work is to increase “self awareness or insight...to bring to the surface as many of the hidden assumptions as possible without intellectualising about it and then to open the protagonist’s mind to co-creating alternative options.” (Blatner, 1988, 3-4)

The largest section in the recent literature on dreamwork is in Chapter 10 of Psychodrama Since Moreno (Holmes, Karp and Watson, 1994, 239 - 256).

**Leif Dag Blomkvist and Thomas Rutzel** offer a rich theoretical perspective, reflecting on the value of “surplus reality” and the surrealists’ ideas. They point out that, as in our dreams, Moreno’s concept of psychodramatic surplus reality is a place where opposites meet, ignoring the “logic of our daily ego and its divisions and controls.” (Holmes et al., 1994, 240) They also differentiate Moreno’s ideas about dreaming from Freud
and dream analysis/interpretation: “Since the unconscious was never an important issue for Moreno, he certainly did not consider dreams as being the via regia to our unconscious, or that dreams were something that must be decoded from their manifest dream context to understand the latent dream thought. Moreno regarded this as wrong, or as a resistance towards the here and now. Moreno considered dreams as something man and his ego had to relate to from the dream’s point of view. Since the creator of the dream is the unknown, something out of the ego’s control according to Moreno, we should experience the unknown rather than try to force it under the control of the ego. This unknown is related to the deepest root of nature....The Surrealist movement...was also sceptical about the analytic interpretation of symbols since this watered down the symbol. A symbol contains a certain energy that will always be unknown to man. However this energy can be experienced, but will not be explained by any logical thinking and rationalisation....The surrealists were more focused on the experience of the dream and the participation in the irrational....Dream psychodrama is a way to encourage and train the ego to relate to the absurd rather than find a latent meaning....By following the dream and the unreasonable wisdom we hope to make the ego more flexible, tolerant and spontaneous.” (Holmes et al, 1994, 240-242)

They go on to tell of their research and practice of dream psychodrama and the expansion of symbols or aspects of a dream by encouraging spontaneous group drama. They recognise that dream material connects us with the co-unconscious (or the collective unconscious, world soul) and so such psychodramas may provide meaningful experience for the group as a whole, not just the protagonist. This idea is taken up in an important innovation in dream work by Barbara Tregear. Following the usual psychodrama practice she has developed the work further, from a protagonist centred to a group method; she wishes to focus on the process flowing between the individual and group that is explored and highlighted by the Foulksian method of group-analysis; her work has also been influenced by dramatherapy and sociodrama.

After a warm-up that enables the participants to experience themselves as both separate individuals and as members of a group (perhaps using a metaphor such as “Where or what would you choose to be in a public park?”) she begins the dreamwork by inviting the group members to settle in a comfortable, safe place and return in their imagination to the privacy of sleep. Now they are asked to visualise a dream of their choice. Next in pairs they tell each other their dreams and are advised they will be
asked to tell their partner’s dream to the group. The dreams are then told to the group by the partner using a less personal style: “The dreamer saw.... (ending with)... the dreamer woke up.”

The group decide on a title for the dream as if it were a play or film (with the agreement of the dreamer). This is the first element of group ownership of the individual dreams. The titles are then written on pieces of coloured paper, the dreamer choosing the colour appropriate and group members vote by marking the papers with their choice of which dream they want to explore. The usual psychodrama procedure then applies: the protagonist/dreamer explores the dream in action with the aid of group members playing roles in the dream: it is dramatised and the dreamer enabled to dream the dream further: to explore each role and element, to develop the story or change the outcome. However then instead of the group sharing and the session closing as usual when the protagonist’s work is complete the group members are invited to choose what element of the dream they wish to explore for themselves: the dream and its symbols and archetypes have become group property and the play of images will have engaged group members interest. They also have the opportunity to become the dreamer of that dream and explore what the dream means to them. This is akin to dramatherapy where a myth is enacted: the metaphors have multiple meanings and can enable members to explore, express, discover. After as many people who wish have played with the dream material there is the usual sharing and closure. This procedure is remarkably rich for the group and uses the co-unconscious of the group. It recognises that dreams touch collective symbols and therefore any dream potentially has meaning not only for the dreamer but for all.

Concluding Reflections:
This survey of the history, literature and practice of dreamwork by dramatherapists and psychodramatists shows that essentially their techniques are the same and mostly originate from Moreno’s insights and action method, although Slade, influenced by the Jungian Dr. Kraemer, independently began using drama in the 1930s to unlock the secrets of dreams without knowing of Moreno’s method.

Each night we enter the theatre of our dreams. We discover within an endless, inexhaustible creativity and spontaneity that may baffle, terrify, amaze, inspire. Dramatherapy and Psychodrama enable us to dream whilst awake and become our own creator. But in the face of the mystery a certain
humility is required: the ego on stage cannot claim all the theatre for its play; waiting in the wings are surprises and the unknown Self. If the therapist dreams of the client then such a dream is best taken to supervision or therapy before being shared with the client!

Acknowledgement:

I am grateful to the following for their contributions to this paper:

Zerka Moreno, Psychodramatist, Beacon, New York.
Barbara Tregear M.A., C.Q.S.W., Psychodrama Psychotherapist and Trainer, Group Analytic and Marital Therapist, Cambridge.

References:


Goleman D., 1996, Emotional Intelligence, London, Bloomsbury Paperbacks


Moreno Z., 1999, personal communication on the date of Moreno’s paper “Fragments from the Psychodrama of a Dream”.


Further reading:


© John Casson 1999