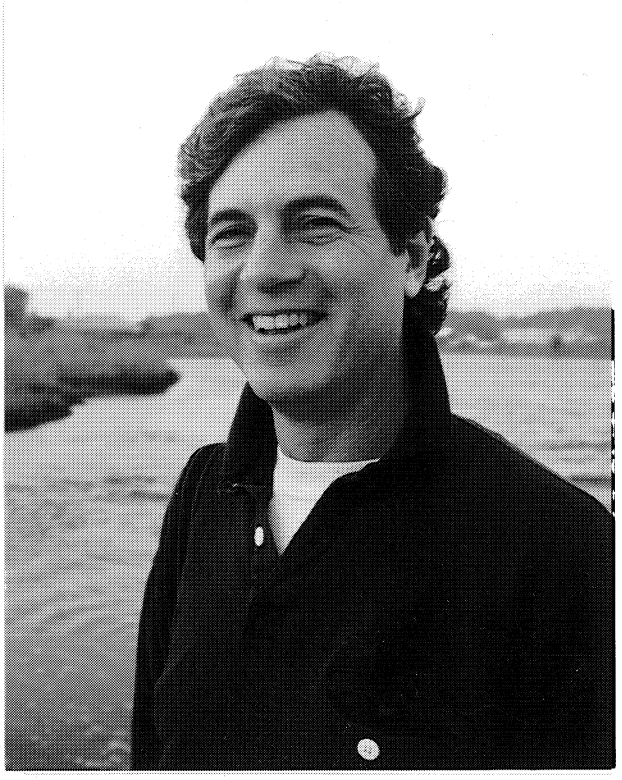
DRAMA THERAPY



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The other side of his experience has been in the arts—as a writer, actor, director, musician, photographer. Staying with these roles has provided an understanding of how best to teach and guide, to learn, follow, and create.

DRAMA THERAPY

Concepts, Theories and Practices

Second Edition

By

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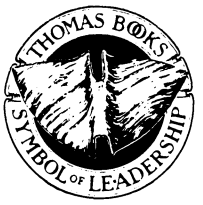

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INTRODUCTION

What is drama therapy? Is it an art or science? Is it therapy for actors? Is it acting for mentally ill or disabled people? Is it a form of sexual fantasy theatre? Is it primal and cathartic, opening up the floodgates of repressed feeling? Is it the same as psychodrama? Is it the same as play? Is it for children only? Is it acting in plays or improvising or role playing? Is it clowning around? The healing properties of the dramatic act have been recognized, scrutinized, and misconstrued for centuries, even before Aristotle mentioned the emotionally cathartic effects of theatre on those who identify with characters in a play. It is only since the 1970s that drama therapy has been conceived as a discipline, a form of education, recreation, and psychotherapy. This book exists as a response to the question, what is drama therapy?

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, the profession of drama therapy has expanded in a number of directions. There are more students who seek training, more trained practitioners, more clients who receive treatment through drama therapy, more articles and books, more techniques and applications to a greater variety of populations, more links to analytical and developmental frameworks, to theatre performance, and to other creative arts therapies. There are more informed individuals who can respond critically to the questions posed above. Along with the quantity is a greater quality of education and training, treatment and publication.

One reason for this qualitative shift is that theory has developed in the field, providing clarity and a greater sense of meaning to the various applications of drama therapy. In 1985, at the writing of the first edition, conceptual ground was broken in Europe and the United States, but theory stemming from drama therapy practice was nowhere to be found.

Of some concern is that, although there are more students, clients, and professionals who practice, theorize, and publish, there are the same number of training programs throughout Europe and the United States, with one addition, that of the Institute of Dramatherapy at Roehampton

Institute in London. That, too, might change if the profession is now ready to take a further step in terms of research and documentation, substantiating the article of faith that drama therapy is indeed uniquely effective in treating a variety of psychological and social problems.

Preparing for that step, I have added substantial theoretical material, offering the current thinking of a number of theorists. Another major addition is an abundance of exercises and examples of the drama therapy process. Further, I expand upon my earlier model of distancing and move into the more archetypal waters of role theory. Through role theory another important purpose of this book is explored—to develop a theoretical framework for drama therapy that derives from the dramatic experience itself.

An additional purpose that I wish to emphasize is the investigation of the general question, how is performance healing? Through specifying the concepts, theories, and practices of drama therapy with a variety of individuals in a variety of settings, that question will serve as subtext to the text that follows.

This edition, like the first, has a single, overriding concern—to stake out the borders of the field of drama therapy. As conceived, this survey does not depict an even terrain, but one of contrast and contradiction. Like the first edition, this one provides the visions of a number of practitioners and theorists. Yet as author, I impose my specific point of view upon the mix, taking full responsibility for my biases, commissions, and omissions.

My perspective is based in a sense of the inherent drama of everyday life and the potential of harnessing an essentially poetic form to a healing function. At the center, I conceive of human beings as seekers of balance who can only learn to be one thing by experiencing its other side, who can only achieve order as they wrestle with their disorderly tendencies. From my perspective as a drama therapist, the things that one learns and seeks and balances are roles. As role takers and role players, people become a cast of characters unto themselves and stumble toward ways to live among the contradictory pulls of their personae.

As mentioned in the first edition, I still believe that the act of dramatization is essentially an act of affirmation. I might add that it is also one of power, grace, and courage. As such, the dramatic act is a healing act.

Throughout the book, the masculine pronoun "he" will be used for stylistic reasons only. It is still my hope that within this discipline, a nonsexist attitude will prevail.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the continuing inspiration of my students and clients who have trusted me with their inner lives and provided a mirror through which to see myself yet again, as if for the first time.

I would also like to acknowledge the influence of my colleagues in drama therapy and creative arts therapy at home and abroad, especially those who attended the international trainers meeting at New Haven, convened by Alida Gersie. And to Sue Emmy Jennings, who missed this event, I send a singular note of appreciation for an extraordinary collaboration through the years and across the waves.

My family has challenged me to dig deep into the roles of father and husband, of attached provider and lover and detached narcissist and scholar. I am eternally grateful that we remain so much together, locked and unlocked.

I offer a special note of appreciation to the woman, full with creation, who offered the concluding clinical vignette in this book. And to the class of NYU graduate students who entered the fray in 1992, I intone a singular hallelujah!

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Chapter 1

ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT FOR DRAMA THERAPY

DRAMA IN EDUCATION, RECREATION, AND THERAPY

Drama

Drama, derived from the Greek, *dran,* literally means a thing done. From both an historical and developmental perspective, drama is a process of enactment that appears to be unlearned and indigenous to all human life. Dramatic action is not simply doing something in the world. When one sits at a desk moving a pen across the paper, one is not necessarily engaged in dramatic action. For drama to occur, it is necessary that the thing is done with some degree of distance. Distance implies separation. In drama, the separations occur between different aspects of the person (e.g., the part that is acting and the part that is observing, the part that is engaged and the part that is disengaged) and among persons. John Guare's play, *Six Degrees of Separation,* is emblematic of the distance found in drama where each role remains separate from all others even as it exists within the same system of interconnected roles.

It is not only distance, then, that characterizes drama, but also connection. Drama is based in paradox, the most essential being that persons acting dramatically live simultaneously within two levels of identity: that recognized as me and that recognized as not-me. This dramatic paradox is most clear in theatre, the art of performing dramatic texts to an audience, where the actor plays the role of a character who is not himself.

It is less clear in everyday life, because the relationship between me and not-me created through play and drama remains unconscious. A child at play, for example, in impersonating a parent, does not consciously say: "Now I am going to act out the role of my mother and feed my doll like my mother feeds me." Rather, he assumes the role of mother

spontaneously. From the child's point of view, there is often no separation at all between the two roles. That is, as he plays mother, he becomes mother, just as some actors trained in the method of psychological realism tend to merge with their fictional roles.

Drama is not only a separation of me and not-me but also a separation of realities. Dramatized reality is different in space, time, and consequence from everyday reality. The child playing with his dolls in the role of mother might, for example, feed the doll for fifteen seconds, then become distracted by another toy and leave the role of mother behind. There is not a chronological sequence to dramatized events that necessarily corresponds to the reality of everyday events. The child behaves as the mother in some ways but not in others. His actions in feeding the doll do not have the same consequences as the mother's actions do in feeding an actual baby. Furthermore, the child easily transforms his play space from a room in his house to a field or a spaceship or another imaginary environment. Dramatic play in everyday life, then, does not follow the classical dramatic unities of time, place, and action. Rather, dramatic play follows the psychological realities of the person at a given stage of development. The child at play lives simultaneously in two realities: that of the everyday, the actual; and that of the dramatic, the representational, the fictional.

Everyday reality is transformed into drama through an act of the imagination. The child is able to conceive of himself as mother through creating a mental image of mother and seeing not only how mother behaves but, at a deeper level, how she feels, thinks, and judges. That mental image of the mother who is good or bad, who is gentle or harsh, is projected outward, becoming the dramatized role of mother played out by the child in his own unique ways.

Examples of drama in everyday life are at least as old as the first appearance of human life on earth. Generally speaking, the more complex the brain and the structure of consciousness—that is, the more one is able to symbolize and to recognize the paradox of me and not-me—the more complex one's drama becomes.

At the early stages in the developmental history of a human being, as the infant tends to merge rather than separate, drama is based in reflexive and imitative action. As the human being becomes more cognitively complex and able to engage in symbolic and projective thinking, his drama reaches a more mature form.

With the development of systems of worship and ritual early in history,

the indigenous drama of everyday life began to take on symbolic forms and serve specific purposes. To ensure a good harvest, a productive hunt, or a victorious battle, celebrants would enact the roles of the elements, animals, gods, enemies. In role, they would perform ritual dramas in preparation for the actual event. Through the drama, they would symbolize their hopes for a good crop or a victorious battle and their fears of hunger and defeat.

With further differentiation of institutions of law and war, religion and healing, education and recreation, drama became a further means to an end. Often that end was education.

Drama in Education

Early dramatic education was not institutionalized; that is, a boy learned how to be a hunter naturally, imitating and playing out the hunter role. However, with the advent of feudal society, drama entered the institutions. The church was the first to apply drama to education. As early as the tenth century, the *Quem quaeritis trope,* relating the story of Christ's resurrection, was introduced into the morning prayers on Easter day. A trope was part of the liturgical text written for special holy days to accompany the church music. The significance of the *Quem quaeritis trope* is that for the first time the text was intended to be performed rather than simply chanted. In it, we find an early form of a dramatic scenario instructing the monks and later the secular mime how to assume dramatic, liturgical roles (Chambers, 1903). Through the dramatization of the resurrection of Christ, many illiterate parishioners learned of the story of Easter and thus participated more fully in the symbolic events of the Mass.

The early history of dramatic education has been well documented elsewhere (Courtney, 1974). Since the 1930s, drama has become an accepted means of education in many schools in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. It is generally taught in two basic ways. The first is as a self-contained subject. That is, students study the art of drama and/or theatre. Secondly, drama and theatre is used as a method to teach other subjects, most notably, history and English.

Teaching History Through Drama

Teachers generally choose one of two methods of teaching history through drama. In the first approach, students enter into the historical

context of a particular time (i.e., the American Revolution). Through their immersion in the cultural experience of eighteenth century dress, movement, cuisine, philosophy, music, art, theatre, and politics, the students re-create a sense of that time. And through assuming the roles of known and imagined historical characters of the revolutionary period they learn about the events, motivations, ideas, and life-styles of people in eighteenth century America.

A second way of teaching history through drama involves a more internal approach. Rather than assuming the external trappings of mid-eighteenth century America, students explore the political, social, cultural, and biographical documents of the time, then search out related dilemmas in their own experience in the contemporary world. Through dramatization, they enact a scene of, for example, a group of townspeople in Virginia attempting to decide whether or not to go to war with the British. Using their knowledge of the history combined with their subjective point of view, the students create a spontaneous drama focused in the exploration of the more universal notion of revolution. Following such an improvisation the group might discuss their thoughts of breaking away from an oppressive institution, looking at examples both from history and from their own experiences.

Teaching English Through Drama

In the late 1960s, the teaching of English was deeply influenced by the work of James Moffett. Among other things, he posited drama, the moment of direct experience, as "the base and essence" of the English curriculum from kindergarten through college (Moffett, 1968). For Moffett, the learning of language is based upon the child's ability to play with sounds and words, rather than to learn the rules of grammar. As the child engages in open-ended, spontaneous dialogue with others, incorporating their language as he incorporates their roles, he comes to understand the means of linguistic communication.

Reading and writing skills can be directly taught through speech and dramatization. Many difficulties and blocks in writing can be overcome if the students begin to generate speech spontaneously, through improvisation, without the mechanical concern of writing it down. In the role of another who speaks in a certain way, the student has the opportunity to create a particular style and form of language. The speech created through this kind of simple role playing can be transcribed by a tape recorder or an older student skilled at writing. The speech can then be

replayed or read back to the student who, in consultation with the scribe, further develops and edits his written piece.

The kind of writing most applicable to this approach seems to be creative, personal writing. However, a role playing approach can also be applied to more objective forms of expository writing. This approach would involve several steps, including the presentation of an issue, a translation of the issue into particular roles and experiences familiar to the student, a playing out of the particular roles, and, finally, the writing of an expository piece based upon the role playing situation.

As an example, a sixth grade teacher might wish to have his class write an expository piece about the dumping of nuclear waste in a particular community. After introducing the issue, he would help each student create the role of a member of that community with a particular point of view (i.e., an irate middle-class citizen, a mollifying politician, a defensive corporate executive). The roles can be reversed, with students taking on points of view that contradict their own. As an intermediate step, students can research the issue through readings and interviews with actual community members. Following the role playing and research, students can speak or write down their thoughts and feelings from the point of view of one character. Finally, they can be asked to create an expository piece, far removed from their first-person dramatizations, yet based upon their role playing and research.

Reading can also be taught through drama. Again, the approach involves encouraging the student to personalize the text so that it is not seen as a forbidding object. One method used with much success is that of reader's theatre. Though performance based, it involves a process of transforming narrative into drama. The students work with a published story, creating a script by breaking it down into spoken dialogue. They add further dialogue, narration, sound effects, and props. Next, they distribute the roles among themselves and, finally, perform their dramatization of the story to an invited audience of peers and teachers. Though the performance orientation can be problematic in terms of competing for the best roles and focusing too much attention on the need to please an audience, the students are able to personalize a text and vitalize it through their dramatic action. A further problem in using reader's theatre is that of trivializing a complex piece of literature. When this occurs, the teacher/director needs to intervene to help the students stretch their ability to play with speech, thought, and language, and find a balance between their interpretation and the integrity of the text.

A further idea involves the teaching of oral communication skills through drama. In fact, a program was developed and implemented in the New York City Public Schools in 1986 to enhance speaking skills through dramatic means (see Landy and Borisoff, 1987). The program, "Reach for Speech," involved several hundred secondary school students.

Through the program, a number of English and social studies teachers were trained to help students identify specific issues of social significance within their communities. The students chose such issues as teenage pregnancy, drugs, violence, and vandalism. Then, the teachers directed a research phase encouraging students not only to read about the problem from published sources, but also to observe it firsthand within the community.

In their research, students encountered a number of individuals involved in the drama of teenage pregnancy, for example. Each was asked to focus in upon one particular individual and to study not only his behavior and motivations, but also his speech patterns. Of special note was the way the individual used language in order to achieve his goals.

Students brought back their research findings to class and played out the roles of pregnant teenagers and their boyfriends, anxious or indifferent parents, abortion counselors, and right-to-life advocates. Through a study of their use of language, the students learned not only to understand the issue, but also to look at ways to think through the problems involved and search for alternative solutions to the problems. Most significantly, they learned the connections between speech, behavior, and intention, which were made as they dramatized their chosen issues.

The final aspect of the "Reach for Speech" program was a town meeting, chaired by then mayor of New York, Ed Koch, and his police commissioner, Benjamin Ward. The students, representing different districts of the city, presented their issues in role, and the mayor and police commissioner responded respectfully and seriously in their professional roles.

A final evaluation of the program provided evidence of increased oral communication skills and enhanced understanding of social issues and personal motivations. The directors of the program attributed these results to the use of a dramatic method of education (see Borisoff and Landy, 1988).