

## Book Reviews

Miller, D. (1997). *Changing the Past: Creating Future Futures From Past Futures Through Psychodrama*. Redlands: Beacon Book Remainders, Monograph No. 6, 1997. 106 pp. (softcover); \$10.00.

The past as we know it is not an immutable structure. It is a reconstruction in memory that can borrow from other sources to the point of confabulation. Furthermore, the reconstructed past usually serves to maintain a personal identity and to perpetuate a selected life script. Future choices are affected by our beliefs about our past experiences and often serve to reinforce them. Armed with this knowledge, the psychodramatist can re-enact past difficulties to a beneficial resolution. By changing the protagonists' views of their past experience, the psychodramatist positively affects future choices and experiences. This is the thesis of Donnell Miller's monograph *Changing the Past: Creating Future Futures From Past Futures Through Psychodrama*. Miller blends theoretical constructs with reports of actual psychodrama sessions to show how working through past conflict can change present choices, and consequently, future futures.

For the psychodrama novice who is used to a linear style of writing in which connections between concepts and each other as well as the overall theory are explicit, *Changing the Past* will pose quite a challenge. Miller's writing is often difficult to understand, particularly in the early chapters on theoretical concepts. Miller introduces concepts without making clear the relationship between that concept and the one preceding it or how it relates to his thesis. It is left to the reader to find where those connections lie. The book is clearly intended for practitioners or those who have had experience with psychodrama.

In the preface, Miller contends that the field of psychology has been unsuccessful in predicting behavior through the use of traits. He suggests that psychology has not, among other things, adequately taken into consideration the individual's perception of reinforcement value and expectations for different situations. However, Miller does not mention Rotter's social learning theory (1982), which deals specifically with the role of expectancies and reinforcement value on behavior. Miller then concludes the preface with a brief

description of psychodrama and how it enables those who often feel out of control to have control over their own outcome.

*Changing the Past* consists of 10 chapters. In the first 3 chapters, the author discusses a number of concepts related to psychodrama. The chapter, "Living Through Time," concerns how our use of words affects our thinking about people. Miller suggests that the use of nouns and adjectives (what the author calls "entity thinking") hampers our ability to understand the changing nature of human behavior. Miller proposes a system of identifying human interactions based on verbs, which he calls "plots." Each plot involves a wish, a fear, and a secondary gain that helps sustain the plot. For example, one might be the verb *to rescue*. When we attempt to rescue in an interaction, we are hoping to be the hero, while we fear failing by not pushing ourselves hard enough. Even if we do fail, we expect to receive the secondary gain of feeling we did more than others. The plots correspond to the roles we play in psychodrama and in life.

In the 2nd chapter, Miller discusses the concept of time and advocates changing from the view of the client's past as fixed to one in which all memories are active constructions that affect and are affected by our views of ourselves. Through psychodramatic enactment, the client has the unique opportunity to go back into the past and negotiate a new role, thus changing the past to make it more congruent with what the client wants.

Miller points out the difference between the persona we take on in our interactions with others (Moreno's "tele") and the part of our selves that decides which role or persona will be presented (Moreno's "auto"). How do memory and identity interact? As Miller explains:

The self is the conserve in which we are maximally invested. Various selves of the past may function as frozen dynamisms, captured as if they were entities. I may identify with my father, but the father I identify with may not be the father as he is today. I may have a stake in denying the difference. What do I gain through glossing over the difference between then and now? This supports angry or fearful current attitudes, justified by past perceptions of past relationships. May we borrow from the THEN to rewrite NOW, or from the NOW to rewrite THEN? In psychodrama we create a new symbol to place alongside the old, which may come to displace the old, when no one's looking. (p. 27)

The last 7 chapters focus on the application of psychodramatic principles. In Chapter 5, concepts basic to the psychodrama are reviewed for the novice psychodramatist. The remainder of the monograph contains examples of how psychodrama is used to deal with a number of problems, including incest, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, and bereavement. Most of the examples are reports of actual psychodramas with Miller as director. The most effective is an example, a hypothetical psychodrama with a person suffering from PTSD, based on Susan Baur's *Dinosaur Man* (1991). A particularly

insightful interaction between the protagonist and the director exemplifies the message of Miller's monograph. After re-creating a scene in which Ivan was able to say goodbye to a childhood pet that had passed away, Ivan exclaimed, "Why do I feel better? That is not the way it happened." To which the director replied, "Not then, but this is the way it happens now . . ." (p. 72).

*Changing the Past* has flaws. The organization and writing style of the early chapters are often unclear, leaving the reader to assume how the different concepts are meant to be related. Furthermore, there are a number of superficial errors (e.g., misspellings, random font changes, and words hyphenated when not at the end of a sentence) that should have been corrected before publication. Nonetheless, the advanced psychodrama student will find the book helpful. The examples are clear, concise, and varied enough to give the reader a sense of how psychodrama can be enlisted to work with a diversity of people and problems. The examples help the reader see how the roles people assume in life are highlighted and worked through by a psychodrama. The examples help make *Changing the Past, Creating Future Futures From Past Futures Through Psychodrama* a valuable resource for those involved in psychodrama.

#### REFERENCES

- Baur, S. (1991). *The dinosaur man*. New York: Burlingame.  
Rotter, J. B. (1982). *The development and application of social learning theory: Selected papers*. New York: Praeger.

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- Hoey, B. (1997). *Who Calls the Tune: A Psychodramatic Approach to Child Therapy*. New York: Routledge. 146 pages, paperback.

This is a lovely book, full of surprises, and at times deeply touching. The author, a play therapist and psychodramatist in Victoria, Australia, weaves together theory and practice so that her book presents a most articulate description of how psychodrama may best be integrated into a multimodal approach to child psychotherapy. Her examples mainly describe one-to-one forms of treatment with children ranging in age from 3 to 15. Sometimes family therapy is used, with one or both parents or with a sibling included in the