

## Book Reviews

*Foundations of Psychodrama: History, Theory, and Practice*, Fourth Edition, by Adam Blatner, MD. ISBN 0-8261-6041-7. 2000. New York: Springer.

Adam Blatner's new edition of *Foundations of Psychodrama* is certainly a classic. Psychodramatic literature is rife with technique-oriented, how-to-do-it manuals, which have their place, but we have little beyond Moreno's works themselves for the why-to-do-it. Blatner, wisely, does not trust "Trust the method." Techniques used without a clear understanding of their rationale can be more harmful than helpful. Directors who go by the book are confused when the unforeseen arises, or they fail when patients sense that the therapist is operating by rote. Blatner enumerates Yalom's eleven healing factors in group therapy and convincingly shows how psychodrama can contribute to them all. No director needs to be at loose ends with so many useful goals at hand. Though Blatner's explanations have their roots in philosophy, they are simple, logical, and utterly clear. He never uses a big word when a small one will do, and when a small one will not do, he defines the big word. He is not stingy with examples when they help, but neither does he fill pages with verbatim quotes from sessions. He may offer a dozen dissimilar examples in as many lines. There is no filler; each sentence is straight to the point so the book has lots to say in its 245 pages. Although the orientation is purely Morenian, a major difference exists between Moreno and Blatner. Blatner is easy to understand. He understands Moreno and explains his theories in plain English. Often I thought, "Of course. I see now what Moreno meant." With one notable exception, Blatner has only good to say about others' ideas and mercifully ignores the rest. He picks the gold coin out of the rubbish with a gentle thanks. That was not Moreno's style.

Despite Blatner's psychodramatic orthodoxy, he was ready to acknowledge what he called Moreno's "personal weaknesses." This he has done tactfully and not at all in the spirit of those who delight in demeaning famous people. Rather, he seemed out to distinguish the man's precious and copious contributions by dissociating them from certain personal traits that alienated many.

Blatner calls a spade a spade and a narcissist a narcissist. Once this point has been established, Moreno's ideas shine all the brighter.

The exception to Blatner's tendency to find only the good in others' ideas is his stance toward psychoanalysis. Whereas he criticized Moreno's exaggerated critique of the whole field, he himself emphasizes only what he sees as psychoanalytic limitations. Blatner criticizes, for example, the analytic premise that dysfunctional patterns develop in childhood and instead emphasizes the field of psychological forces acting in the here and now. Surely this is only a semantic quibble. Any analyst would readily agree that, although patterns developed in childhood persist in the present, they contend with the countervailing ego factors from current reality. Still, Blatner cannot resist using a host of analytic concepts throughout and favorably cites the work of Winnicott, Bion, Kohut, the ego psychologists, and object relations analysts. Nevertheless, he missed the opportunity to bridge the gap that could help bring psychodrama into the mainstream of psychodynamically oriented therapies. And there certainly is strong ground for the reconciliation between these fields.

Blatner is passionately committed to a "post-modern" philosophy. As he explains, premodern philosophy, typified by the theologically dogmatic, constricted intellectual life of medieval times was later superseded by "modern" thought typified by the values of the enlightenment, rationalism, materialism, and positivism. The current reaction against this latter world view is a "post-modern" philosophy to which he subscribes, which emphasizes the substantiality of a nonmaterial world. Here psychoanalysis and Blatner's postmodernism are in the same camp, opposed by behaviorism and pharmacological psychiatry. They both honor the reality of conscious and unconscious subjective life.

Like Moreno, Blatner has an *idée fixe* of his own. He is infatuated with imagination/play/joy. Once he has established that the subjective realm is as real as is the objective world, he takes the dangerous step of attributing objective reality to what is properly subjective. When we say that a person thinks a thought, certainly the thought truly exists, but it is another thing entirely to say that the thought is therefore true. We look inside to see what is inside, but to discover what is outside, surely we must look beyond ourselves. The appeal of a philosophy that promises objective truth by revelation opens the way for wishful, magical thoughts and the breakdown of the separation of religion and science. On this point, Blatner's usual lucidity seems obscured by his *idée fixe*.

Moreno's famous wish to be remembered as the man who brought laughter into psychiatry and Blatner's *idée fixe* tilt them toward the positive emotions. If Blatner can bring joy into our workaholic, anhedonic culture, bravo. Many are those who, while not suffering a mental illness, can still benefit from a greater capacity for enjoyment. Even those suffering from real depression

have been shown to derive real benefit from watching a good comedian. The limit to this approach, of course, is the danger of covering up, rather than facing and understanding, psychogenic unhappiness and its causes.

Blatner gives us a very important restatement on the issue of catharsis. Because psychodrama is uniquely suited to facilitate cathartic release, there is a tendency to consider that as its primary objective. In the very early days of psychoanalysis, catharsis was thought to be the essence of the therapeutic action. Very soon, however, that factor was demoted to a much lower rank so psychodrama then came to be seen as still attached to a primitive and long-outdated objective. Here Blatner comes to the rescue. He reminds us that, while Moreno gave catharsis very high priority in treatment, he also distinguished between different kinds of catharsis, only one of which, the "catharsis of abreaction," is what can generally be considered catharsis at all. Most important is what Moreno called the "catharsis of integration," a process closer to what psychoanalysts would call "working through." Insights glimpsed at a supreme cathartic moment tend to be resorbed and very soon fall prey to repression. The bulk of analytic effort, then, is devoted to examining in detail the manifold implications and ramifications of these insights in the analysand's ongoing life. That is exactly the same goal as Moreno and Blatner's "catharsis of integration" except, of course, that the means are psychodramatic.

Blatner includes an introductory description of sociological role theory, explains how Moreno expanded it, and then gives it his own personal twist. He also includes two excellent chapters on practical sociometry. The whole explanation is, as usual, clear and eminently useful. I was especially pleased to see that Blatner appreciates the hazards of sociometry and counsels great perspicacity in the use of its data. I had seen residential psychodrama groups where sociograms were posted on bulletin boards, leaving the rejected individuals devastated. Blatner convinced me that, precisely because sociometry is so potent, its powers can also be judiciously tapped for therapeutic purposes. He makes clear that the telic bonds of a group's sociometry are always a matter of the highest significance to be kept in the forefront of the director's mind.

After presenting all of the above, Blatner then devotes a chapter to succinct synopses of 72 psychodrama techniques that he had not mentioned earlier. He also includes a 14-page international bibliography.

To go from the sublime to the obsessive, I note that the book has many references mentioned in the text that do not always appear in the list of references at the end of the chapters, and the listed references often appear nowhere in the body of the work. Nonetheless, this book is unequalled by any psychodrama text I know of. Certainly all trainers will assign it to their students. My concern is that it might become so much of a psychodramatist's bible that students will swallow Blatner's mysticism and religiosity along with

their training. But apart from this point of departure, I feel greatly relieved that someone has finally written a book to serve as an anchor to anyone who wants a clear statement of what psychodrama is about.

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*Psychodrama: Creative Therapies in Practice*, by Paul Wilkins. London: Sage, 1999.

This book is one of a series on creative therapies in practice, of which Paul Wilkins is the series editor. The author intends the book to be “a comprehensive overview of theory and practice,” drawing “on case material to demonstrate methods and techniques.”

A glance at the titles and content of the nine chapters (excepting the first and last chapters) leaves the impression that this is one more introductory book on how to conduct a psychodrama, but that is not the case. Chapter titles, such as “Setting the Stage” and “Warming Up,” operate on a meta-level and are figures of speech, rather than literal labels of content. Wilkins explains all of that in his preface, and in chapter one he writes about the birth of psychodrama, its locus, matrix, and *status nascenti*, including key concepts. Throughout the book, key terms are in boldfaced type, and examples and illustrations are in italics, which makes them easy to identify.

Chapter two is about instruments, techniques, and essential elements. Chapter three is about starting a practice, training, and working with clients. Chapter four is about running beginning group sessions. Chapter five is about encounter, warming up, selecting a protagonist, choosing a director, moving into action, and using auxiliaries and doubles. (To my way of thinking, a double *is* an auxiliary.) Chapter six is about directing a drama, including the use of doubles and role reversals. Chapter seven is about the role of the audience, achieving closure, and sharing. Chapter eight is about the infrastructure of the worldwide psychodrama community. Wilkins includes information about processing, which is used in training groups but not therapy groups. He offers information about joining a group, working as psychodramatist, and finding out more about the method or the people who use the method. He provides useful Web site addresses.

The final chapter contains a critical—not to be confused with negative—view of psychodrama as a therapeutic modality, an explanation of the resistance to J. L. Moreno by the behavioral science community, and criticisms of psychodrama as a method. The author’s tone in the book seems even handed,