

## Book Reviews

*The Quintessential Zerka: Writings by Zerka Toeman Moreno on Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy*, edited by Toni Horvatin and Edward Schreiber. 2006. New York: Routledge. 328 pp. ISBN: 1583917284

This book contains samples of the writings of Zerka Toeman Moreno, from her first publication in 1944 to an unpublished paper about suicide prevention that she wrote in 2004. The purpose of the text was to compile the writings of Zerka Moreno, especially journal articles that have been difficult to access, and to provide, in one source, her significant contributions to the fields of psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy.

Anyone who has studied psychodrama and sociometry knows that J. L. Moreno, MD created them. He also made seminal contributions to naming and developing group psychotherapy. Zerka Moreno's role in clarifying and developing these inventions has been less obvious because she worked in the shadow of her husband, the creative genius J. L. Moreno, until his death in 1974. This text takes the reader back to Zerka Moreno's early contributions in the 1940s in which she described and clarified concepts that Moreno had presented in his earlier publications, which were translated from German and often difficult to understand.

*The Quintessential Zerka* includes the history of J. L. Moreno's and Zerka Moreno's contributions to the creation and development of psychodrama and sociometry, and, to a lesser extent, group psychotherapy. The historical account alone makes this text a valuable contribution to the theory and practice of psychiatry and applied psychology. Beyond the historical account, the most important contribution is the definition of the basic theoretical concepts of psychodrama and sociometry and specific examples of how these concepts are operationalized for a variety of populations, such as the military, well-baby clinic patients, premarital couples, parents, students, psychotic patients, and families. Because it provides the definition and application of concepts such as role-reversal, doubling, use of auxiliary egos, and mirroring, the book would be an excellent textbook for a course in psychodrama if it were supplemented with related readings

of action therapies. Article 14, “Psychodramatic Rules, Techniques, and Adjunctive Methods,” and article 30, “Psychodrama, Role Theory, and the Concept of Social Atom,” are particularly strong in historical development, theory, and application. Article 34, “In the Spirit of Two Thousand,” explains Zerka Moreno’s concept of future applications of psychodrama and the role of psychodramatists in society.

The text, as acknowledged by the editors, has built-in repetition because several of the articles as they were individually published provide a description of theory and techniques that are applied to a given population and are, of course, defined again in another article dealing with a different population. However, for the novice, some repetition can be helpful in learning concepts. One problem I noticed is that definitions of terms are not consistent, especially for the term *tele*. It is used so broadly it fails to define anything. For example, the same article (article 35) reads, “*to express the simplest unit of feeling transmitted from one individual towards another* we use the term tele, ‘distant.’” “Tele is two-way empathy: like a telephone it has two ends” (p. 291); “If tele is the bond based on mutual recognition of the other, it follows that it is responsible for cohesion or lack of cohesion in a group” (p. 293); “Tele not only relates to mutuality of choice, it also points the way to reciprocity via the reasons for choice” (p. 293); and “We became acutely aware that tele involves two dynamic categories for being: namely time and space” (p. 294). My interpretation of tele is “liking, loving, and respecting in one” (p. 299). Even though tele seems loosely defined, the Morenos have used sociometric research to determine its level of existence in a group.

An observation I gleaned from reading about J. L. Moreno’s theory development that I had not gained from earlier readings is that he was constantly researching his theory and application, even though his research designs were not very sophisticated in comparison with today’s research design models. Unfortunately, current practitioners do not have the same zeal to research psychodrama.

Overall, I found this text to be a comprehensive presentation of the history, theory, and application of psychodrama with a lesser emphasis on the history and application of sociometry and group psychotherapy. This is to be expected because Zerka Moreno has probably made her greatest contributions to psychodrama. Without her major contributions to theory, application, and training and her work as the primary spokesperson for psychodrama, this potent psychotherapeutic intervention may have been lost.

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The editors have done a great service to the fields of psychodrama, sociometry, role theory, improvisational drama, sociatry, and other related endeavors that have emerged from the genius of J. L. Moreno, MD (1889–1974). For a number of years before Moreno's death, his third wife, Zerka, had become his most articulate spokesperson, the primary trainer at his institute and sanitarium at Beacon, New York, and the developer of continuing refinements and ideas of her own. Since his death, Zerka Toeman Moreno has continued to be the doyenne of psychodrama and continues to offer training workshops from her home in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In 1989, Jonathan Fox edited and published a collection of Dr. Moreno's writings (which, though out of print for a few years, has now been republished). I remember thinking even then that a similar endeavor is indicated for Zerka Moreno's writings, which have, for me, always stood out as being significantly more clear and specific than her husband's. This book is even more relevant because those early and later articles have become increasingly hard to find in many libraries. Now students and trainers have ready access to these treasures.

Zerka Moreno edited much of J. L. Moreno's writing through the mid-1950s and co-edited and co-wrote the second and third volumes of the *Psychodrama* series (Moreno & Moreno, 1959, 1969) and she certainly helped with other publications as well. They were still major co-editors of this journal until Dr. Moreno's death. Aside from this, Zerka Moreno has been prolific in her writing of many of the more cogent articles in the professional literature.

The table of contents of *The Quintessential Zerka* is broken into five sections that are unfortunately called chapters, each with four to eight articles. Each section includes articles written during a different phase in Zerka Moreno's life. The first article was written in 1944. This section covers the period from 1941–48 when Zerka Moreno first met Moreno and became his secretary. The second chapter, or section, deals with her collaborations and activities from the time of her marriage until 1966, when she started taking on more training responsibilities as Moreno's involvement began to decline. The third section, "Transitions," reveals her increasing productivity and guidance. The fourth section, beginning with Moreno's death in 1974, is titled "On Her Own." Some of her articles presented here really capture the growing edge of the movement. The last section is titled "The New Millennium and Beyond" and includes three more recent articles that many people have not seen. In total, the book includes 36 articles (and these are not all of the articles Zerka Moreno wrote).

The editors added extra value to *The Quintessential Zerka* by asking Zerka Moreno for her comments on each article and how she currently views the significance of each article's contents. Thus, the chapters are each prefaced by between one and several paragraphs of Zerka Moreno's commentary. There are also selections from her poems, *Love Songs to Life* (Moreno, 1971/1993). These add a measure of personal emotion and wisdom to the mix.

A number of the articles included in these pages have certainly been important in my own development. When I first discovered psychodrama in the mid-1960s, in addition to the consulting and training I received from some experienced professionals, I tried to read more about the practice. I was surprised and dismayed to discover that there were no clear instructions in the most recognized sources (i.e., Moreno's three main *Psychodrama* volumes). However, I received some guidance from Zerka Moreno's articles on the double technique and psychodramatic rules, which are presented in chapters 5, 7, 13, and 14. These were particularly helpful when I was learning how to direct psychodramas.

Article 28 is a good summary chapter about psychodrama that Zerka Moreno composed for a major psychiatry textbook. (Alas, as psychiatry has turned more toward developing the biological basis of mental illness, the information explosion in recent years has pushed more interactive types of psychotherapy to the margins of major textbooks.)

The book begins with a foreword by Dale Richard Buchanan, who adds biographical information. These notes about Zerka Moreno's background are important because, other than sections in my *Foundations of Psychodrama* (Blatner, 2000, p. 26–27) and a monograph by Renee Ouidijk (2001), her biography has not been published.

The articles focus on a wide range of subjects, from child development to reflections on the history of psychodrama and its influences. The collection is over 300 pages long, with a thorough index and bibliography. It also includes a few of Zerka Moreno's unpublished papers. Many of these articles were hard to find, and the collection brings them together from a variety of sources and makes them available to psychodramatists. I agree with Zerka Moreno noting the seminal influence of J. L. Moreno's work, but I might temper the assessment of how much weight we should give to that influence in relation to the influence of others' contributions.

Moreno did not confine himself to psychodrama, at times suggesting that psychodrama was an action method for implementing the principles of sociometry. Yet, psychodrama has become the main approach associated with Moreno's work. *The Quintessential Zerka* may help to realign the field with a broader range of efforts and a higher-level vision. As a young man, Moreno was especially interested in ways to revitalize spirituality in light of contemporary circumstances. The immediacy and power of encounter and spontaneity

expressed not merely utilitarian human dynamics but, rather, his vision of the way Divine Creativity operated in the Cosmos (Blatner, 2000). His interest in drama as a vehicle for growth, healing, and community is alluded to in passing and a bit more cogently in a previously unpublished talk Zerka Moreno gave at the National Association for Drama Therapy conference held in New York in November, 1997. The bridges among drama therapy, psychodrama, and extensions of applied drama in other areas have continued to be developed, positively expressing Moreno's vision of *sociatry*.

In this collection, Moreno's interest in sociometry is repeatedly reaffirmed. In the economic and social fashion that made psychotherapy a major industry in the 1960s and 1970s, sociometry was perhaps insufficiently emphasized. The Board of Examiners has since made its study a core of preparation for certification. Yet, sociometry should be recognized as a young field in need of continual research and development. Zerka Moreno's articles relating to sociometry, particularly in chapters 8, 15, 16, and 35, will support this important frontier.

In regard to therapy, Zerka Moreno was more in touch with the development of new therapies or variations on the established approaches in the 1960s, but she was not unaware of the way that many had at least partial roots in Moreno's writings or the work of people influenced by the Morenos.

A 1971 article on the concept of catharsis, "Beyond Aristotle, Breuer and Freud: Moreno's Contribution to the Concept of Catharsis" (chapter 22) weaves together creative fantasy, scholarship, and historical perspective, noting the power of the mind-expanding and integrating catharsis by the actor. Alluding to some of the improvisational and new approaches to theater at the time, Zerka Moreno reaffirms the extra power of enacting one's own life situations. Since the 1990s, improvisational modes of drama have been used as tools to help people develop their capacity for spontaneity and mental flexibility, to enrich community-building, and to promote life enhancement. Many of these modes have either been directly influenced by J. L. Moreno's work or parallel his insights. This frontier of what he called *sociatry* is now called *applied theater*; an anthology of some of its various forms was published recently (Blatner, 2007).

I was intrigued with articles 25 and 27 in the middle of the book, which extend Zerka Moreno's earlier writings about doubling and child development (e.g., article 10) into a consideration of adult development. Although she wrote these articles around 1975, she intuitively noticed phenomena that have since been validated by neurophysiologists regarding the function of mirror neurons in social interactions (Hug, 2007). The power of helping the not-yet-ready-to-be-expressed ideas come forth was also addressed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who called the edge of psychosocial skill development the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978). These articles also

complement J. L. Moreno's writings about the spontaneity theory of child development and add useful perspectives to the more well-known stages of psychosocial development described by Erik Erikson (1959).

In summary, *The Quintessential Zerka* is a major contribution to the field and a gathering of many classic articles. It should be included in the library of every trainer and serious psychodramatist.

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