

movement took hold—as it left them to carry on the good work; then it was someone else's turn.

My own feelings were mixed as I arrived in Beacon that spring afternoon. I had felt a deep sorrow the week before when Zerka called me in California to tell me that her husband would soon die. Moreno had been able to talk briefly on the phone. We joked a bit, and I entreated him to stick around until I could come to Beacon to say good-bye in person. He said matter-of-factly, "Lew, I'm ready to die, but I look forward to seeing you."

It was hard to conceive of the loss of my former teacher, second father and friend of over 25 years. But when Zerka told me about J. L.'s acceptance and even encouragement of his own death, I felt a great deal of comfort. "After all," said Zerka, "he has lived a full and significant life."

PSYCHODRAMA LIVES!

by LEWIS YABLONSKY

The venerable founder of psychodrama is gone, but his legacy is a reminder of his remarkable life.

Lewis Yablonsky, Ph.D., is a sociologist and a practitioner of psychodrama. He is at work on a book on psychodrama.

The last time I saw J. L. Moreno was shortly before he died, when I traveled to his home and training center in Beacon, New York, to say good-bye. His death was a fitting departure for the man who invented psychodrama, for Moreno, in a sense, directed his own rites.

By the end of last April, a series of minor strokes had weakened him. At age 84, he was confined to his bed, unable to move and slowed down considerably in his speech. Such immobility was particularly distasteful to a man of Moreno's energy who felt that his basic life force and vigorous spirit were still intact. It was his decision to stop eating altogether, and he subsisted on water until he died.

At that time, the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, which Moreno had founded, was meeting in New York City. Over 2,000 professionals from all over the globe had traveled to attend the conference, and many of them had come explicitly to say good-bye to Moreno. At first, he consented to see only a few close friends. But finally he told his beloved colleague and wife, Zerka, "Let's not be negative. Say yes to everyone who wants to come to Beacon to see me."

So Moreno spent his last days propped up in bed, while hundreds of former students, friends and professional associates filed through his bedroom one by one. Each visitor would pay his or her final respects, exchange expressions of love and lean over to be hugged by Moreno. Moreno would then raise his fist in a power salute—a gesture that he initiated years before the black-power

When I arrived, life at Beacon was going on as usual. The peaceful New England atmosphere at Moreno's wooded country estate belied the activity in the buildings that served as a powerhouse for psychodrama training and publications. Some 20 students, who lived in a dormitory residence, were training as psychodrama directors in the theater. In another building, an office of secretaries worked on correspondence and publications of Beacon House, Inc., which has published almost all of Moreno's writings, as well as various journals of group psychotherapy and psychodrama founded by him.

When I walked into Moreno's bedroom, he had a smile of welcome on his face. We embraced and kissed, and I could feel a sob rising in my chest. "This is no time for sadness, Lew," Moreno whispered in my ear. "I've lived a full life. I've done my job. It's time for me to go on to something else."

Although he was prone, he was still my director and I was the protagonist. According to his plan—one that I more than welcomed—I spent the afternoon in the dining room, right off his bedroom, reading his as yet unpublished autobiography.

His book spanned a 60-year career of innovation in psychodrama, during which he discovered the value of psychodrama and other group processes in diagnosing and solving personal problems. From the beginning, he was fascinated by the theater. His work as a therapist began in his native Vienna, where he ran rudimentary psychodrama sessions with children playing in the city gardens. When he founded the Theatre of Spontaneity in 1921, he began refining his method into psychodrama and sociodrama as we know them today. Both the theory and method were far ahead of their time. Fifty years before R. D. Laing and other thinkers emphasized the value of "acting out" and downplayed the importance of pathology, Moreno was experimenting with these concepts in a live theater setting.

Moreno's "acting out" produced the bedrock scientific foundation of the contemporary practice of group psychotherapy and psychodrama. He was first a practitioner of group psychotherapy, psychodrama, psychiatry and medicine—but in the process he wrote over 40 books and hundreds of articles illuminating his work. In this vast array, Moreno produced two landmark books: the first, on group psychotherapy, was *Das Stregreiftheatre* (Amer-

"Moreno described the stage as a vehicle for expressing all of the heavenly and hellish feelings that exist."

ican translation—*The Theatre of Spontaneity* [New York: Beacon House, 1923]) and the second was the now classic *Who Shall Survive?* [New York: Beacon House, 1932]. *Who Shall Survive?* provided the first contemporary analysis of "future shock"—people versus the machines of their own creation, and the sociometric fact of the group as the central focus for therapeutic intervention. Along the way, Moreno founded and developed the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (1947) and the journals of *Sociometry—A Journal of Interpersonal Relations* (1937) and *Group Psychotherapy* (1947), the official organ of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy.

As I turned the pages of Moreno's autobiography, my thoughts drifted back to 1949 when I first entered the orbit of this creative man and his works—and saw my first psychodrama. At the time, I was a graduate student at New York University where Moreno taught a seminar in psychodrama. Moreno's was one of the most popular courses in the university. Most of his classes were dialectic, but, as part of the course, we were invited by Moreno to attend a session at his Psychodrama Theatre, then on Park Avenue. I had a limited idea of what to expect, having read some material on psychodrama, and I thought I would see a play—a human drama produced by the group.

The psychodrama theater I entered was about 50-by-50 feet. There was a round stage at one end that dominated about a third of the room. There was a crowd of 40 people, mostly students nervously awaiting the opening of the session.

All attention focused on Dr. Moreno when he appeared from the wings. He quietly stood in the center of the stage for several minutes until the group settled down. He was a slightly stout man of average height, attired in a corduroy-leather, patched-sleeve jacket. Without saying a word, in a period of two to three minutes, his presence seemed to produce emotional waves. I observed in the group broad smiles that seemed to signify acceptance. Mingled with this response appeared to be individuals who looked frightened. Would this man expose their humiliating self-doubts and secrets? A few were hostile, whispering that he, Moreno, looked like a clown, a charlatan. Obviously, I had no way of knowing whether there was any truth in my perceptions. They might all have been my personal projections onto this charismatic, fascinating man.

He began the session by describing the stage he stood on as a vehicle for expressing all of the heavenly and hellish feelings that existed in the group.

He pointed out the difference between the vehicle of the stage as infinite life space compared to the chair in usual therapy. The person presenting a problem in psychodrama would encounter "live" all of the people involved with the problem. Not being restricted to talking about the problem one-dimensionally, the person could act out the situation, with members of the group portraying the characters necessary.

The people who played these significant characters

were identified as auxiliary egos. Moreno looked at me and said, "For example, if this young man were to act out his conflict with his mother, the lady who portrayed his mother would be an auxiliary ego." I asked Moreno how he knew I had conflict with my mother. "Who doesn't?" he replied. Clairvoyance, I soon discovered, was part of psychodrama. It seemed to infuse the group with a sense that the director knew all and produced a certain hypnotic atmosphere.

Moreno walked over to a young couple who seemed fascinated by his performance up to that point. "Are you two married?" The woman beamed, "Not yet—we're engaged." She held up the hand that displayed the diamond ring, the universal symbol of marriage in the '40s for a proper young middle-class couple from Brooklyn.

Moreno took the young woman's hand and brought her on stage. "How would you like a marriage pretest? Let's explore your compatibility with this charming groom." She assented.

Moreno assigned me to play her intended as an auxiliary ego and asked another young woman to play her double. (The double's function is to help the protagonist contact his or her feelings by voicing the thoughts and emotions that the protagonist may not wish to reveal.) I quickly found myself assuming the role of a young law student from a proper, reasonably wealthy, highly religious family. In the first scene, I met my future fiancée at a dance. It soon became apparent—on the surface, at least—that she fit the perfect stereotype of the virginal princess. As her fiancé, a business administration major at New York University, her family's background suited me perfectly. In the session, I became hungry with the thought of getting a significant share of her father's large business as the husband of his only child. In one scene, the father and I discussed the possibility—humorously, of course.

An hour into the session, we were sailing toward a perfect marriage. Then the storm erupted—much to my surprise, but not Moreno's. We were purchasing my intended's engagement ring. Suddenly, this quiet, acquiescent girl ripped the real ring off her finger and threw it at me.

"I don't want you—my parents want you but I don't," she yelled at me.

"What did I do wrong?" I asked.

"It's nothing you did—it's what you are. You're exactly like my father! I don't want my mother's life—it's dull and meaningless. That's what I would have with you!"

The group was shocked—and so was her boyfriend. She started to cry, deep sobs convulsing her body. Her double held her and sobbed with her. This emotional catharsis went on for almost five minutes, and Moreno let it take place without interruption.

Moreno then guided her through several scenes that revealed her distaste for the conventional. It became apparent that she was simply following, on the surface, the line of least resistance set forth by her parents and her culture. In that context, she was accepting this "perfect" young man.

Her inner self, however, craved a life of creativity. As it turned out, she had deep, sincere aspirations to become an artist. The session unleashed the inner reality that conflicted sharply with her external acceptance.

When the young woman seemed thoroughly drained, Moreno ended the role-playing phase of the session. The couple sat down beside him and they began to talk about their relationship, as they never had before. There was a deluge of complete honesty: the woman telling her intended that she knew he only wanted her for the status and affluence her father could confer on him. The young man admitted this was true but also how her display of

"In psychodrama, the protagonist has complete control over his or her truth as each sees and feels it."

involvement in psychodrama. I was offered and happily accepted a scholarship to train with him at the New York Institute and at his center in Beacon—50 miles north of New York City. Beacon was both a sanatorium for patients and the World Training Center for Group Psychotherapy, Sociometry (the study of group structure) and Psychodrama. The Beacon property of almost 100 acres, I later learned, was a gift to Moreno in 1936 by Gertrude Franchot Tone (the mother of actor Franchot Tone)—a wealthy woman whom Moreno helped through a period of personal conflict. Although Moreno was the spiritual leader at Beacon, his wife and partner, Zerka, ran the Beacon and New York organizations. A brilliant psychodramatist in her own right, Zerka had of course been trained by the Master. In those days, and over the past 20 years, she was the administrator and chief educational director of Beacon. The Moreno Institute, the only center anywhere that trains and accredits psychodramatists, has graduated thousands of students from all over the world. Zerka Moreno continues as its active director.

What I remembered most about Moreno at our early private meetings were his eyes. I never had anyone look at me so directly, so honestly and with such intensity. When I later read Moreno's poem "Concept of the Encounter," it put in words what I experienced.

A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face.

*And when you are near I will tear your eyes out
and place them instead of mine,
and you will tear my eyes out
and will place them instead of yours,
then I will look at you with your eyes
and you will look at me with mine.*

Without words, I immediately had a very direct and personal encounter with a man I felt had some mystical qualities. As a scientist, I really don't believe in mysticism, but, with Moreno, I had a feeling that if there was such a thing as mindreading, he could do it. His perceptions were not extrasensory, but more likely based on a close understanding of our culture, motivation and body positions in psychodrama.

As part of my training, I went to Beacon and helped direct weekend workshops. Today, marathons and other weekend-type encounters are common, but in the early '50s, intensive marathon workshops, such as we had at Beacon, were a novelty.

In *Who Shall Survive?* Moreno comments on his double effort to broaden the concept of psychiatry beyond its medical and sociological limitations and to expand the concept of religion beyond its historical and theological limitations:

The burning problem . . . is the combination of two variables, the healer and an adequate theory or method. Therapeutic theories and methods without the physician who embodies them, able to grasp and to practice them, are meaningless and dead. A healer without adequate theories and methods is like a painter without arms.

In those days, Moreno faced opposition from more traditional social scientists, but his attitude was philosophical. Many of the members of the "helping profes-

sions" during the '50s were very threatened and hostile. One has to remember that at that time individual therapy was still clearly the predominant approach. Here was Moreno, talking of the importance of the group in producing personality modification and social change. These ideas were beginning to stir up the minds and guts of all stripes of psychiatrists and psychologists.

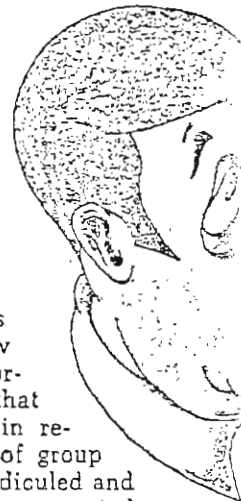
Many of them felt threatened because most of their professional lives centered around the training and practice of individually-oriented psychotherapy. Those who saw the validity of Moreno's social science system and the necessity of having to change their direction so dramatically were often unconsciously disturbed by this prospect.

One afternoon, Moreno invited me to accompany him to a lecture he was giving to a group of about 100 New York psychotherapists. I have never forgotten the hatred and chastisement that Moreno encountered that afternoon in response to his belief in the primacy of group therapy. He was openly denounced, ridiculed and laughed at during the question-and-answer period.

Moreno maintained his cool, however. As we traveled downtown, I said, "How can you take these insults?" He smiled. "First, Lew, I know I'm right. Secondly, I may be crazy like they say, but I'm making a lot of other people like you crazy with me—and each year I will be considered less crazy." He has, of course, been more than vindicated in his beliefs.

These and other early memories of Moreno came back into focus for me as I sat, near his bedside, reading his last book. Still not fully assembled or edited, it was a 1,000-page, glorious tour of a truly epochal life adventure. It contained much that I knew—and some things I learned about for the first time. He was born Jacob Levi Moreno, of Sephardic Jewish parents, on May 20, 1892. His family moved to Vienna when Moreno was four. The autobiography was rich with recollections, such as his description of his first "psychodrama." Moreno, four years old at the time, was playing with a group of children in the basement of his parents' home. He organized the group into an impromptu play in which he took the role of God and the other children were angels. They piled chairs upward toward the ceiling and Moreno sat on the top of the structure while the children circled about it, flapping their arms like wings and singing. He reported that he found the whole production satisfactory until one of the children suggested that he fly. He tried it—no doubt well warmed up to the role—and found himself on the floor with a broken arm. The incident was a long way from formal psychodrama, but it contained most of the basic elements: creativity, spontaneity, catharsis and, it is safe to assume, insight.

In his early 20s, Moreno studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Vienna. He received his M.D. from the University of Vienna in 1917. In those early years, his philosophic heroes were Hegel, Spinoza, Jesus and Socrates. He was a brilliant formal scholar but he always enjoyed direct contact and "doubled" for people in all walks of life, never restricting himself to an ivory-tower existence. Among his many activities, he role-played with children in the gardens of Vienna; furthermore, he recounts that some of the first formal "psychodrama" and "group psychotherapy" sessions he ran were in the brothels of Vienna. He felt an empathy for the working women of Vienna and helped to organize



spontaneous are in the session turned on feelings for her he never knew he had.

Moreno pointed out how they had both colluded in relating to each other's images. That now, with this breakthrough in communication through psychodrama, they might possibly relate to each other as real people. And that it was only through relating to the authentic person that their relationship had a chance. They could have lived out their lives with the other as a robot-image, but now they had a chance to relate with greater passion to each other's true self.

The session produced shock waves in the group. Others began to reveal their identification with a similar problem. Some talked about false relationships that they had with parents. A couple married for 12 years began to realize that they were a horrible example of the fate this young couple might avert through psychodrama. They began to detail where they went wrong and to argue how they might become more authentic and intimate with each other.

My own reaction was intense. I began to examine my relationships. But more than that—in playing that young man's role, I became him. It was my first session as an auxiliary ego, but I realized that the roles I could play in sessions were unlimited. (Since that conversion to psychodrama in 1948, I have had the deep and varied experience of enacting almost every role in Western civilization. I have played a priest, a rabbi, Adolph Eichmann, God, a pimp, a killer, Jack Ruby, President Kennedy and many others. The enactment of these roles has enlarged my existence—a side effect of psychodrama.)

After the couple had gotten more positive feedback, Moreno gave a long lecture on the essential elements of psychodrama, which was my introduction to its basic method and rules.

He emphasized that it was more valuable for the protagonist to act out his or her conflicts than to talk about them. The presence of auxiliary egos who play the relevant others in the protagonist's life gives a greater sense of reality to the production. The stage and props (tables, chairs, etc.) also help create a greater reality and depth.

Moreno then explained his concept of the "here and now." The protagonist always acts in the present tense—even if the scene revolves around a childhood incident. Whenever a protagonist would slip and say, in a scene from the past, "When I was five I loved my mother," Moreno would correct the protagonist, saying, "I am five and I love my mother." Psychodrama clarifies the reality that we can never again act in the past. All we can do is give our current conception of a past situation. Psychodrama enables us to objectify (in the immediate situation) a significant memory of an important event we carry with

us in our psyche—to make it come alive now.

In psychodrama, the protagonist has complete control over his or her truth as each sees and feels it. For example, a male protagonist may perceive his mother as overwhelming and oppressive. If the group met his actual mother, they might be surprised to see a quiet, shy person. The session, however, revolves around the protagonist's perception. Later in a session, the reality of other people's viewpoints may be presented, but the protagonist is first entitled to his session—as he sees it.

In a session with someone severely disturbed who sees "a devil," for example, the director and the group do not try to argue the protagonist out of the delusion by saying it's a hallucination. They join in by accepting the distortion and enter the protagonist's own world, even though at a later session they may attempt to introduce the consensual reality of the group.

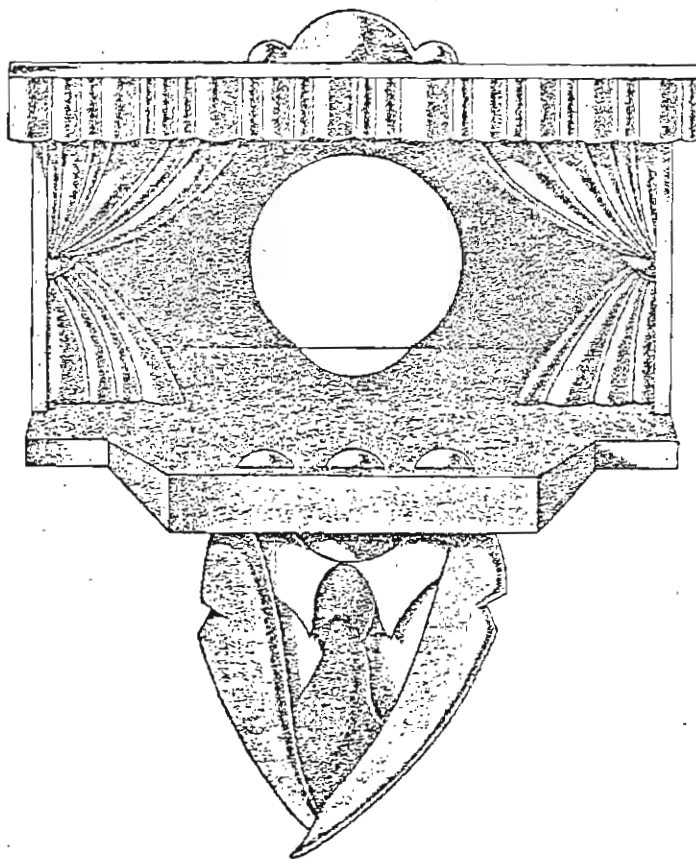
According to Moreno, "The person's enactment of the presently perceived reality comes first—retraining comes later." In this regard, Moreno advocates allowing the protagonists as much as possible to pick their scene, place and auxiliary egos, to enact their problem.

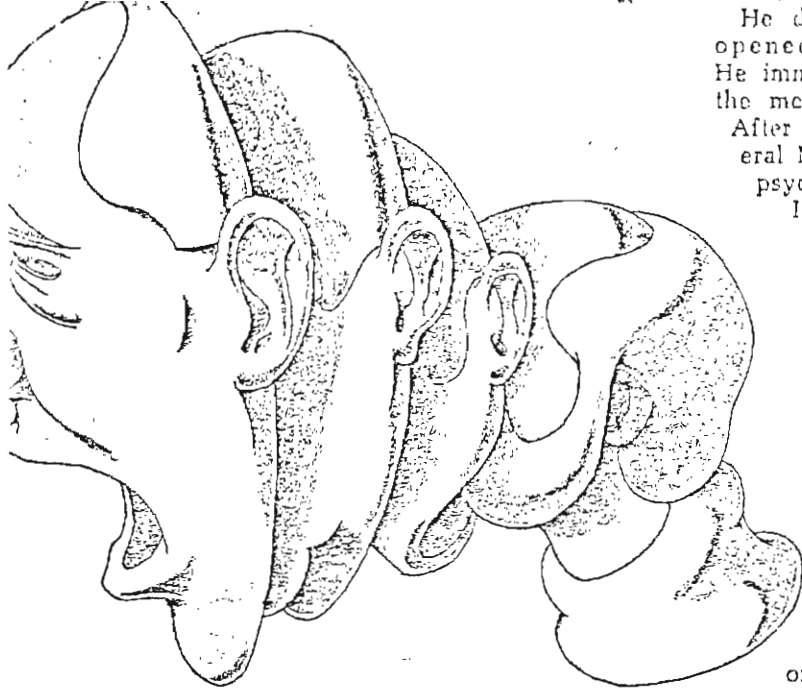
It is an assumption of psychodrama that a protagonist learns and relearns more effectively when deeply involved in a crucial scene from his or her life than when simply talking about a situation. It involves what Moreno calls "insight in action." Often, this insight may first be experienced on a subconscious level. In this case, it is usually unnecessary for the protagonist to verbalize any

insight or catharsis. It has already been experienced in action. As Moreno stated, "Even when an interpretation of an act is made, the action is more primary. There can be no meaningful interpretation without the act taking place first."

There are three phases to a psychodrama session: (1) the warm-up, (2) the action and (3) the postdiscussion. The warm-up and the action of a session are vital; however, Moreno emphasizes that the postdiscussion is also highly significant. Here the group shares their empathy and experiences with the protagonist. For example, in the session revolving around the engagement, many members of the group revealed their own unsureness prior to accepting the boundaries of marriage. The protagonist thus becomes aware of not being alone in the dilemma. It also provides the group members with the opportunity to reflect openly about their involvement in the session and to synthesize their response. There is ample room for analysis in psychodrama, but one basic principle is that analysis should always follow the action and the postdiscussion.

This session and Moreno's course triggered my deeper





hundreds of them in small informal encounter groups to discuss their plight and problems, even aiding them in forming a union.

Moreno also began to see the benefits gained from the group process by these women: "I suspected to begin with that the 'therapeutic' aspect would be here far more important than the economic," he wrote, "because the prostitutes had been stigmatized as despicable sinners and unworthy people for so long in our civilization that they had come to accept this as an unalterable fact. . . . We began to see then that 'one individual could become a therapeutic agent of the other' and the potentialities of a group psychotherapy on the reality level crystallized in our minds."

Several years later, according to Moreno's autobiography, he joined a Vienna theater group where his ideas were heavily flavored by the world of the stage. One day, an argument broke out between a married couple. Some took the wife's side and others in the group sided with the husband. Finally, to resolve the conflict, Moreno directed his first formal session by suggesting they reenact the scene as if in their home. He knew then that the portrayal of their real selves was more electrifying than any theatrical performance. Based on this experience, Moreno began to experiment more rigorously with role-reversal, the double, mirroring behavior and other methods that have since become a part of psychodrama.

His concepts were also sharpened over the next decade in dialogues with such figures as Freud. Moreno rejected what he considered to be the static quality of Freud's system. He felt he could never restrict his practice to a one-to-one relationship in an office setting, because he saw his theories as action methods. Creativity involved being an actor rather than an analyst.

He moved to the United States in 1925 and I recall from his autobiography his sardonic opening line on American social science: "When I arrived in the New York harbor, I was asked by a newspaper reporter what I thought of American sociology. I answered: 'The only American sociologist I can think of is Walt Whitman.'"

Moreno came to the United States to promote an invention he was working on, a machine for the recording and playback of sound on steel discs. His interest in this form of technology led to later experiments with the

He decided to make this country his home and opened a psychiatric practice in New York. He immediately set out to introduce psychodrama to the mental-health professions and the general public. After conducting psychodramas with children at several New York hospitals, he began a series of open psychodrama sessions in Carnegie Hall, known as the Impromptu Group Theatre.

During this period, there was also considerable progress in sociometry, a discipline invented by Moreno that focuses on the emotional relationships among people in small groups, in terms of interpersonal attraction and rejection. Moreno made sociometric studies among prisoners at Sing Sing in 1931 and 1932, and from 1932 to 1938 he was engaged in a long-term sociometry project at the New York Training School for Girls at Hudson, New York, with Helen Hall Jennings, then professor of education at Brooklyn College.

Most of these episodes in Moreno's autobiography were not new to me. I was familiar with my friend's life history since, over the years, he had told me many stories—over dinner, on the train between New York and his Beacon sanatorium. We had long talks during summer vacation when I sometimes stayed at the Beacon center directing workshops and sometimes assisting him with revisions of his articles and books. Still, reading this panorama of events and insights was an overwhelming experience for me—especially when the hero of the odyssey was 10 steps away. I read for five hours, stopping only to laugh with him over some humorous episode or probe a point with him.

As I approached the end of reading the autobiography, I noted a vignette related to Freud that we both especially enjoyed.

In Moreno's creative megalomania, he wrote that he had died and, of course, had gone to heaven. As part of their heavenly reward, he and other philosophers were to participate in an eternal dialogue among the brilliant minds of history. On this particular day, Moreno was the subject of an intellectual trial that involved a grand rap session between Spinoza, Einstein, Hegel, Christ, Freud and several other luminaries. The subject, of course, was the relative merits of psychodrama versus psychoanalysis. After several hours of brilliant debate, the group had reached a stalemate. One "celestial" member, noting that Freud had been strangely silent in defending his position, asked him what he thought of Moreno's psychodrama. A silence fell on the group, as they anticipated a powerful and eloquent diatribe that would elevate the merits of psychoanalysis far above those of psychodrama. Finally, Freud acknowledged stoically, "If I had lived longer, I too would have most certainly become a psychodramatist like Moreno."

Moreno and I laughed over his vision of paradise as I sat by his bedside for the last time. It was early evening, and I was preparing for my ride back to New York City with some students then in residence at Beacon. Even now, I see that final farewell as less of a definite separation and more of an evolutionary step in my relationship with Moreno. We embraced, and I left the room feeling that he was still with me. When I direct a psychodrama or write about the method, I think about Moreno. And when I realize the freedom that psychodrama has given me—the ability to play many roles in life with a wide range of emotions and a broader intellectual perspective—I feel a closeness, not a separation, with the wonderful man who founded the movement. :B