

QUESTIONS STUDENTS ASK ABOUT PSYCHODRAMA TECHNIQUES

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This is in response to questions submitted by students attending a training workshop. Do not attach any importance to the sequence of topics covered. There is no concluding summary, in order that additional topics may be added as needed in subsequent editions.

Let us distinguish between "method" and "technique." Psychodrama is a method of psychotherapy (among other things), whereas doubling, reverse roles and the mirror are psychodrama techniques. We may make a parallel distinction between "strategy" and "tactics." It is the distinction between what we have set out to do and the specific way in which we do it. The former has to do with goals, the latter with tools. The emphasis here, then, is on what the director has available to him as he guides the protagonist through the psychodrama process.

DOUBLING

The prime function of the double is to make the protagonist aware of the full range of himself, especially feelings and relationships, so that his freedom of choice may be expanded in order to take more responsibility for his behavior. The major types:

1. Supportive: This is the basic type, which all other types presuppose. The double immediately takes the posture of the protagonist as he joins him on stage, preferably on the side farther from the audience. He moves as the protagonist moves, taking into account the clues coming in from his own proprioceptors. Unless he is already well warmed up, he lets nonverbal doubling take priority, for speech normally grows out of gesture, not vice versa. Verbal doubling based upon such a foundation has a better opportunity to hit the mark.

The client-centered mirroring of Rogerian psychotherapy is analogous to doubling, except that the double, as alter-ego of the protagonist, says "I feel" rather than the "you feel" which the Rogerian therapist says to his client. Moreover, the double springs to declare just what it is the protagonist may feel, usually without waiting to begin with the words, "I feel." He focuses on those feelings which are known to the protagonist, but which he shows some uncertainty and/or inhibition in expressing. It is poor technique to plunge to the depths in the hope of dredging up some "unconscious" feeling without having established one's identity with feelings the protagonist knows only too well. Unless the inhibited and suppressed material has been brought forth and acknowledged by the protagonist the group can hardly fulfill their healing function of accepting what the protagonist's life experience had taught him was unacceptable.

It is not enough that the double seems to be on-the-mark. Directors must remind protagonists from time-to-time that we cannot be sure whether the double is right or

wrong unless the protagonist "picks-up-on" the double's continuing productions, or clearly denies what the double has said. When the latter occurs, the skillful double doesn't argue with the protagonist, but immediately incorporates what he's been told. Doubles are necessarily wrong when they insist that they're right, even when ... perhaps especially when the objective observer would say they were correct after all. This situation should be taken as evidence that the rejected production has been premature, not that it is false. On the other hand, subsequent developments may show that the protagonist had been true to his actual feelings, contrary to the impression others had of him at the time.

As much as possible, the double should use the protagonist's own vocabulary. One should not rephrase for the sake of literary excellence. Repetition which looks redundant on paper may be the very thing the protagonist needs.

The director may need to remind auxiliaries on stage that material which the double produces, but which hasn't been acknowledged or denied by the protagonist, hasn't happened! Auxiliaries are there to respond to protagonists, not to doubles.

2. Investigative: Here the double is more directly conscious of assisting the director. The double focuses on some clue the director seems not to have noticed, through asking (as if he were the protagonist) a question of the open-ended type, leading the protagonist further out along the line suggested by his initial clue. But beware of over-using this function. You may upstage the director and/or alienate the protagonist. Watch for the effect of your question or probe on the protagonist. If he doesn't seem grateful for such assistance, chalk it up to resistance, and wait till the climate improves before trying again.

3. Confrontive: This is the investigative double with the gloves off, and directed at the protagonist rather than the director. This should never be done except when there has been clear evidence the protagonist has fully accepted the double in his supportive role, for confrontation strains most relationships. Its value is manifest only when the relationship is secure enough the protagonist reacts without defensiveness.

The confrontive double has been useful in providing a stimulus to some emerging feeling, such as teasing or jeers in provoking anger. Or something like "I can't do that" when the protagonist is warmed up enough to respond in the spirit of "O yes I can!"

Another indication is when the protagonist has already seen something but is moving away from it too quickly. This helps him face it. But beware of being punitive. That is not helpful. One exception: the confronting double may be a way of gaining

the attention of those protagonists who see confrontation as caring, as drug addicts in therapy often badger one another. Protagonists with a background in Gestalt Therapy or EST are likely to have that kind of a set.

But remember, the confrontive double is of dubious value in breaking down resistance, to say nothing of bringing down the wrath of the group on one's head!

4. Interpretive or better, Integrative: Beware. If one interprets in terms of a theory, such as the psychoanalytic, one risks taking the protagonist on a "head trip." It's well for the treatment team to be cognizant of theories, for these are often quite helpful in sorting out what is pertinent from an abundance of data, but when working directly with the protagonist never use the jargon nor make the theoretical basis too obvious, especially when the protagonist himself is a professional.

Dynamic theory is often reductionist and dehumanizing. No matter how helpful it may be to one's own thinking, or in communicating with other professionals, as in report writing, it alienates the subject. Rather the double (and the director) should look to the connections among events (present and past) or among relationships (patterns recurring with different persons in different settings) or of the ideosyncratic use of particular words. Often the repetition of the special word at the strategic moment may help establish the connection.

Conflict within the protagonist may be represented by bringing in a second double (without dismissing the first), especially when the opposing feelings the protagonist expresses tend to cancel each other out. The director has the option of reversing the protagonist with each of his doubles in order to clarify and to prioritize among the double's representations. The director's next step may be to search out the relationship between doubles and the protagonist's social atom, then move on to decisive events.

#### SOCIODRAMA

Sociodrama may occur in the midst of a psychodrama, but don't let it take over. For example, in a recent psychodrama a "housewife" gave clear evidence of suffering from domination by her authoritarian husband. Sympathetic women eagerly sought the director's attention to get on stage, while others volunteered anyway. Their very eagerness put several men in the group on the defensive, and they too sought a hearing. Rather than try to keep all this out, the director elected to take the protagonist to one side with "Let's see what we can learn from this." At the same time he succeeded in keeping the group under his control, bringing the unscheduled sociodrama to a timely halt, once the polarities had been established, then giving the green light to the protagonist's renewed participation, capitalizing on what had just transpired in the protagonist's behalf, and making clear distinctions between where the protagonist was coming from as opposed to where various members of the group "were at" during the sociodramatic interlude.

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If you wish to set up a sociodrama from the very beginning, choose a social problem where the audience is divided in its convictions, but convinced of the value of sociodrama. Here "protagonists" are simply vocal representatives of viewpoints. Choruses of doubles are acceptable because it is the issue which matters more than any one individual. Have the opposing groups reverse roles when feelings have reached a fever pitch, and insist that the full range of feeling be explored from the reverse role position. Don't reverse the groups back to their initial positions, but leave them there at the end of the sociodrama.

Beware of trying to do a sociodrama where the audience is not truly divided. I remember an occasion at a large meeting when a very pretigious director attempted to do this, even with a sympathetic audience, but was unable to carry it off, for there were no "true believers" for one of the polar alternatives. No matter how hard some persons tried to represent the view they didn't really believe in, it just didn't work.

#### SELF-CRITICAL PROTAGONISTS

In a neurotic context, consider that a protagonist is likely to be a perfectionist who has become dissatisfied with the slavery he has imposed on himself, and asks the director, "What do I do with the critical part of me?" Exploration shows that in his life experience "acceptance" has inevitably been linked to outcomes or performances. Worse than that, inconstancy or unpredictability of mood of parental figures may have increased his uncertainty over just what sort or degree of behavior met their standards.

One option open to the director is to create a multiple double situation where the "critic" is isolated as a part, or better yet, as a role. It should be clear that the critic is not the whole person. Put the protagonist in the critic position, and when he is thoroughly warmed-up to the role, ask "Who kept talking to you like that" or "When (or where) have you heard that before?" "From whom?" This takes the protagonist into his social atom where the appropriate repair work can be done.

Some directors may choose to encourage dialogue between "critic" and "defenders" But where is the protagonist to be? Passing between empty chairs? Interacting with one auxiliary who reverses as he does? Standing to one side as two auxiliaries mirror what? The two sides of himself, or himself in two roles?

For me this is not the preferred route, but if you elect to follow it, you could call upon the protagonist to work toward compromise through negotiation. The defender must find a valuable and safe way for the critic to express himself. Moreover, he must convince the critic that his very survival depends on his protecting the defender.

Help the critic to relate to specific fears. Resolve on a course which befriends the critic through making him more secure. Find a plausible way to reassure the original source of the critic (from the protagonist's social atom.) that his concerns are respected. though what is in his interest may require reinterpreting.

### HOW TO INTERVIEW

In general of course one may interview the protagonist in ways common to clinical situations everywhere, but psychodrama offers the distinct advantage of interviewing the protagonist in the reverse role position, as if he were someone else. Of course in so doing we do not suppose he is providing an objective representation of the other as an individual. Rather he is making explicit the relationship between them, which from an interpersonal point-of-view is much more pertinent information anyway!

Begin with the general and move toward the specific. Some typical questions, to be asked in rapid-fire fashion: "What is your name?" "Where are you from?" "What do you do?" "What do you do for fun?" "How old are you?"

"Describe what you look like so that we can see you?" If the protagonist's spontaneity is such that we can deduce appearance from the posture taken, react to his presentation with an appropriate question. "Does your back bother you?" "Since when?"

"Are you living at home?" "Who else is there?" "And what is your place in the midst of them?" Knowing ordinal position in the family is valuable data, the source of a variety of hypotheses which could provide avenues for fruitful exploration.

"Married?" "Ever been?" "What happened?" "How long?" or "How long ago?" Then, "What is your relationship with the protagonist?" We follow this with questions based on what he's told us. I nearly always end with "Is there anything else we need to know about you?" It's amazing what that brings out sometimes.

Remember to include questions about children or about the extended family, if that seems relevant. Also when relevant, "How do you like school?" "Your job?" "Have you had any recent losses?" "Who don't you see anymore?"

Of course one varies the extent of questioning in accord with the time available and how important we anticipate the answers may be for the psychodrama. One's attitude in interviewing constantly responds to the accumulation of information. The director is not a dispassionate neutral observer, but a person whose warmth is right there with the protagonist, reacting on a feeling level to all he hears or sees. Then we follow up with genuine interest any line of questioning which seems productive.

The protagonist feels that the director is quite sympathetic to his point-of-view and is giving him his whole attention. The director's comments indicate that he really understands.

### WARMING-UP AN AUDIENCE

Nothing warms up an audience faster than a leader who demonstrates he's interested in them individually and collectively, and who will also facilitate their interest in each other. Watch some of the experts on TV, night club entertainers in Los Vegas, or successful fund raisers, or travelling evangelists.

The question of warm-up seldom has the regular continuing treatment group in view, for each patient is likely to arrive with his own warm-up. The director's task is to tap the individual's willingness to share his concern with the group, then to move toward a common focus on one person, who has come to represent the group warm-up. Indeed, the cohesive group may very well select a protagonist without any direct assistance from the director.

With new groups, especially demonstration groups, a very different situation prevails. Many arrive expecting to be entertained. A few may expect to run the show. An obvious ploy is to sample some of those expectations in the hope of discovering or developing a common thread. Here are some techniques which may be helpful.

The 2-4-8 method works well with large groups. It gets people out of their chairs and focused on one another. I call upon everyone to seek out someone else whom they do not already know, but would like to, so that one could introduce the other to someone else. Then each couple must find another couple to enlarge their range of acquaintance. Groups of four are then called upon to find other groups of four. That done, with at least one experienced person in each group, the group may explore the concerns of each of its members and arrive at a candidate for protagonist. Beware of letting this phase run on too long, for potential protagonists have been known to talk their way out of their warm-up. The director who casts a watchful eye on all the buzz groups seizes each potential protagonist as he emerges and leads him to the stage. Those that remain in the audience are told to return to their chairs, or rather return their chairs to their original position and give attention to those on stage. Each candidate presents himself to the whole group, and the group makes its choice.

When one has spotted an attractive, spontaneous person in the audience, the director may invite person to come to the stage, then interview in a non-threatening or humorous way. After a few minutes the director asks him to select someone else from the group to interview, just as has been done with him. Before very long the director excuses his initial choice from the stage, asking the new person to select another person to interview, and so the process continues through three to six people. This is called a chain-warm-up. The director may halt the process at any point he believes sufficient protagonist material has emerged for him or for the group to make a meaningful choice.

Doctor Moreno liked to move through the audience striking up conversations and making provocative comments with such warmth and enthusiasm those address<sup>d</sup> would respond in kind, while the whole group listened in. To speak "confidentially" as if one were speaking to each person simultaneously moves the group along, especially if

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one is open about oneself, exposing some foible with which most people can readily identify, such as "How I hate Monday mornings!" or "I swore I'd never take another drink when .... etc."

Theater groups have developed several warm-up techniques. One I especially like involves having the whole group make a circle. If the group is too large for that, I simply ask for volunteers to make a circle in the center of the room while the others watch. I step into the center of the circle and present myself expressing some sort of feeling, while the group members in the circle mirror my behavior. Then I choose someone there to take my place in the center, modulating into another feeling, which the group imitates and so the process continues. Often this is done as a nonverbal warm-up, though the usual high noise level contributes to the experience.

Other standard techniques which come to mind are the auxiliary chair, the magic shop, and the action sociogram. I've used a verbal approach which emphasizes the ability to remember names with groups which are strangers to one another, or with a group which is entirely new to me. One simply has each person present his first name as we go round the circle, together with what that name makes him think of. The director finds this is sufficient for his remembering all the names, and the group is impressed with his memory. Then he shows them they can do the very same thing, as some members of the group respond to the challenge to name everyone in the group. When someone falters, we prompt, not with the name but with the association. Nearly always that brings the name to mind, without the sense of failure which comes with needing to tell the name again.

Also there are action approaches. "Show us your earliest memory." "Be something which may represent you (such as animal, vehicle, .... etc.)." "Show us the first home you remember. Be that house. Take a posture like that house....etc."

The social atom is a good beginning point: "Who is the most important person in your life? Be that person?" Conduct an interview with the person, then take the next most important .... etc. Generally, sociometric kinds of warm-ups are to be preferred over exercise type warm-ups. Likewise those techniques which give maximum space to individual and group spontaneity are preferable to those which minimize it, such as the guided fantasy -- unless, of course, the guided fantasy is open-ended.

#### BALANCE OF FANTASY AND REALITY IN A PSYCHODRAMA

Generally, one starts with reality, in accord with the rule, "enactment before re-enactment," and one returns to reality at the close of the psychodrama. The director must always be clear on what he's dealing with before he sets out to change it. In common prejudice fantasy is considered the opposite of reality and therefore inferior

to reality. But reality includes fantasy. How bleak our worlds would be without our fantasies. If no fantasy, then no art, no creativity, and science degenerates to mere technology.

Our working with psychotic patients contributes to the bias against fantasy in leading us to think of all fantasy as escapist. Should we try to strip the psychotic patient of all his fantasies in the interest of effecting a "cure?" Not at all. What is required is the ability to distinguish between the literal and concrete on the one hand and the symbolic, metaphorical and fanciful on the other.

We do not make the mistake of telling the patient he should have no fantasies. Rather we encourage him to share his fantasies with interested and accepting other persons, for fantasies become dangerous only when we fail to share them. It is consensus which legitimatizes them as a basis for action, if action becomes appropriate. Indeed, the very act of having shared may enable one to let go of an obsession and be thereby delivered from its dull repetitiousness.

Another deliverance comes through the psychodrama. This is what the expression "Let him have his psychodrama" means. A good example is the psychodramatic baby fantasy. This is the baby one wishes to have had, to which we give concrete expression on stage, opening the door for improved communication with living persons, who know and accept us more for what we have shared.

Sometimes protagonists are skeptical of the value of repair work based on fantasy. Parental figures one struggles with in psychodrama are usually the ones the protagonist grew up with at early, critical periods in his life. Look for depressed periods in mother's life; also extended absences, illnesses or hospitalizations. The so-called "mother inside" may only be superficially modified by the current relationship. We must be quite clear on "mother when?"

One may "rewrite the past" through casting into a new perspective (re-framing), as each generation of historians rewrite history in the light of emerging understandings. When, in the midst of the psychodrama, we have presented mother "as she is," that is, by psychodrama's use of the present tense, "as she was then," we move on to presenting "mother as I need her to be." The public presentation of the need together with the group's acceptance of that need creates a vivid new memory to place alongside the old one, and prepares the protagonist for present perceptions confirming the new image, rather than continuing to reinforce the old one. Thus we subtly alter the character of the mothering one in the protagonist's life toward a more healthy direction.

More specifically, here is the sequence we follow. To the protagonist: "Reverse roles with mother. Now show us the kind of mother the protagonist needs." Then we reverse the protagonist back to himself, and the auxiliary takes mother's role again.



Now as mother the auxiliary plays the kind of mother the protagonist has shown that he needs. We encourage the protagonist to react nonverbally as well as verbally, as he finds fulfillment in the re-enactment.

In another variation the director pulls the protagonist out of the dead-end childhood role he's been enacting, while an auxiliary takes the protagonist's place with the "punitive parent." This is not for the purpose of mirroring. Rather this has been set up as an opportunity for the protagonist-as-adult to rescue the protagonist-as-child from the oppressor.

A third avenue is to set up a future projection, where one does for one's child -- or client or student, what one wishes had been done for oneself. But don't stop with the protagonist in the reverse role position. Reverse him into the child, client or student role to receive the benefit of the better treatment. At last we return him to his own role in the present.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT

The importance of the present in psychodrama is acknowledged in several ways:

1. All scenes are done in the present tense, no matter whether past, future or imagined.
2. Psychodramas always begin with where the protagonist is right now. The director asks what brings up the concern at this particular time.
3. Psychodramas typically end with the present or the immediate future.
4. Matters which involve people there in the group are to be confronted in the here-and-now, unless there is a clear contraindication against doing so, such as an understanding with the protagonist decided at the beginning, and consented to by the others involved. Otherwise, the director is alert to the likelihood that present people may also become protagonists now.
5. Whereas the past is (relatively) fixed, and the future is not yet, it is only in the present that decisions may be made. The present is the time of maximum freedom, the exercise of which builds self-esteem and a sense of responsibility (in its root sense, the ability-to-respond). The present is the tense of hope.
6. When we want to refer to timelessness, or eternity, the present tense is the proper vehicle.

#### ROLE TRAINING

When, in the midst of the psychodrama, it becomes apparent that the protagonist has a difficult situation to deal with in the present or immediate future, role training is indicated. Thus the director functions in a supportive way, setting to one side how the protagonist got himself into this mess in the first place. Moreover, there are reality situations which may be thrust upon anyone, no matter what. Here is one sequence:

1. The director says to the protagonist, "Show us the situation," with the protagonist taking the reverse roles position. Then we call in an auxiliary to take the critical role, while the protagonist copes as best he can.
2. Then we pull the protagonist out to observe, while several from the group mirror his behavior.
3. If the protagonist's behavior during the mirroring shows he's on to something, we prevent his discussing it, and send him back into the scene to explore his insight in action. After that we have to repeat 1 and 2 above, unless he's been successful.
4. If the protagonist says, "Yes, that's me, but I don't know what else to do," we turn to the group as a resource, challenging several volunteers to play his role in the situation in another way. Not necessarily the recommended or "right" way, but in a way that is different. Sometimes volunteers set out to do it badly, which at least occasionally turns out not to be so bad after all.
5. Again, we do not let the protagonist comment on what he has seen, but send him back into the situation as himself. Then we have him reverse roles with the auxiliary so that he can assess the impact of his behavior on the other. If in the light of the new information he wants to try something else, we continue the process.
6. The final sharing may take the form of group feedback, which does not analyze the protagonist as a person, but restricts itself to the analysis of behavior.

#### THE PROTAGONIST'S CHOICES

The protagonist requires a sense of autonomy within an area controlled in such a way as to prevent outside interference.

1. The protagonist must realize he has veto power over directorial decisions.
2. Nevertheless, the director serves as a kind of writer of the protagonist's story as it unfolds. The protagonist lets the director know at the beginning what he wants to work on, if he knows, or what feeling predominates. The director responds with a series of successive approximations of the protagonist's experiences and relationships, regularly checking where the protagonist is at with each change of direction.
3. Directors must realize that too many choices may paralyze the protagonist. Therefore he uses open-ended questions in major matters, and in minor ones (always in response to some clue the protagonist has dropped) he may say, "Let's see that" or "let's go to that." Save the question "Should we" for emergencies. When confronted by alternatives which seem equally important to the director, he may say "We may do this or we may do that. Which would you like to move to first?" Even though it sounds paradoxical, the protagonist experiences more freedom when the director proceeds with

confidence and makes choosing an easy task. One key is the director's skill in structuring alternatives.

4. Keep in mind barriers and satisfactions. Usually it is necessary to remove barriers before proceeding to satisfactions. On the other hand, the protagonist needs to have hope. Sometimes the expansion of a scene may allow enough fulfillment to keep hope alive. Don't put it off too long. That satisfactions may occur through surplus reality provides a foundation on which they may be found at an adult level in life. However, there may not be sufficient time within a single psychodrama to develop this properly.

5. Warm-up operates within the action portion of the psychodrama too. In order to establish the expectations with which characters approach a scene, the director may call for a scene showing what may have happened "on the way there," or what went on within the protagonist before the auxiliaries' arrival.

6. A time "leap frog" allows the director to move the psychodrama along quickly when it threatens to become repetitious, or when the subject matter, for one reason or another, is practically unmanageable on stage (such as the homicidal, suicidal or perverse deed). This places the emphasis on outcomes, which impulse ridden persons ignore. Thus the leap frog may take us to a future projection, which elucidates in fuller detail the meaning of the present event.

7. When the protagonist construes his experience intrapsychically, choose auxiliaries to represent the parts temporarily, but exert every effort to discover the interpersonal antecedents of those parts.

8. Flashback may be used within a scene when the protagonist begins to describe a pertinent scene from elsewhere. Move to another part of the stage, with the promise that you will come back to the original scene with its props remaining in place, after you've finished the flashback. Beware of overdoing flashbacks. One can go off on so many tangents that protagonist and audience risk losing the thread of the forward movement of the psychodrama.

#### HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A SCENE

1. Be sure you've led up to it properly.
2. Use the double, including the possibility of having the protagonist double for himself.
3. In the reverse role position, the director may turn the protagonist's head to one side for his "confidential" reading of the other fellow's experience.
4. In expansion, after adequate enactment, underlying material is brought into the interpersonal relationships. One does this more in later scenes than earlier ones.
5. One may represent the protagonist's dividedness through multiple doubles, but

- beware of overusing this ploy. There may be better ways of accomplishing the same.
6. Represent conflict schematically, such as having auxiliaries pulling arms in opposite directions. They should exert just enough pressure, not too much.
  7. When the protagonist is in the midst of an abreactive catharsis, stop other actions (unless their continuing is essential to the continuing catharsis). But don't stop what the protagonist himself is doing, unless what he is doing threatens to pull him away from his feelings. Beware of premature reversing of roles. If the protagonist has his catharsis while in the reverse roles position -- which often happens, take plenty of time before reversing him back to himself. Sometimes beginning directors fail to see the signs in time and the moment is lost. Watch the protagonist closely.
  8. Don't let the scene run on too long. Test the protagonist's state with "Is there more here?" or "Have we reached the main point?" If his answer is yes, then "Bring the scene to a close."
  9. Integrative ploys are best in pulling a scene together. Recognize the full range of ingredients. Relate them among themselves in some way. The director may ask "How are we going to get these parts together?" to give space for the protagonist's creativity. That done, he may make specific suggestions "Try negotiating" or "Try loving it in" or "Resolve the situation nonverbally."
  10. Always be on the lookout for clues. One need not process them immediately, but they serve to inform the director of the probable flow of the situation, which itself may suggest the direction one should take.
  11. Clean up the scene before moving on, unless you're taking the short cut of moving forward while keeping the same props in place. We may ask the protagonist to close his eyes while we continue speaking, or we may turn the lights down and up to provide the necessary break between one scene and the next.
  12. Surplus reality scenes, with their easy opportunity for concretization, are more suitable for bringing things together, whereas reality scenes are better for exploring.
  13. Use the whole theater, not just the stage. Use the whole group when possible, especially in making sounds. Remember to use vertical as well as horizontal space.
  14. Put the double in for the protagonist so that he can rescue or stick up for himself from the vantage point of his present age.
  15. When you use surplus reality, remember to make the imaginary plausible somehow. Take advantage of the protagonist's belief system.
  16. Remember that God, fate and places provide excellent focii for the protagonist. Most of the Biblical book of Job could've taken place on a psychodrama stage. Job, by the way, is a helpful resource to call to the protagonist's attention, if he fears God may be offended.