

*The following is an excerpt from the book:*

## **Insight Improvisation**

**Melding Meditation, Theater, and Therapy  
for Self-Exploration, Healing, and Empowerment**

by Joel Gluck, MEd, RDT

*To learn more, please visit <http://www.insightimprov.org>.*

© 2015 Joel Gluck. All Rights Reserved.

*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).*

## Psolodrama Examples

*We are all born mad. Some remain so.*

— Estragon, Act 2, *Waiting for Godot*

Psolodrama can play out in many ways, and one way to illustrate some of its possibilities is to provide a few full-length examples. These show a sense of the arc of a typical psolodrama and portray several of the techniques, roles, and types of stories that can arise. The three examples in this chapter come from actual psolodramas experienced in peer and individual practice (examples from clinical practice appear in Part IV of this book, the chapter “Working with Individuals”). Details have been changed to protect anonymity, and edits have been made to focus on the essence of each psolodrama.

One downside to providing examples is that a newcomer may think “this is what psolodrama is.” Psolodrama is an expansive form that allows for the diverse styles and approaches of all who practice it. As a one-person improvisation, it tends to bring out what is unique in each individual, providing the witness and/or therapist a powerful experience of the soloist’s inner world. When reading these examples, know that your own psolodramas will likely be very different.

The examples in this chapter feature multiple characters, including the more specialized psychodramatic roles such as the director and the double. However, it is equally possible to experience powerful psolodramas featuring only one character, or a single auxiliary ego in dialogue with the protagonist. Similarly, although the examples in this chapter each portray one fairly coherent story or dramatic arc, one can also have a psolodrama comprised of unrelated scenes, in which the psoloist returns to stillness or authentic movement between scenes, and from listening to the body discovers new roles and a new story. Often, when sharing with the witness afterward, what seemed unrelated during the psolodrama may upon reflection form a coherent through-line, or portray a set of related themes.

Throughout this chapter, and for the remainder of this book, when a new character appears we will use notation to indicate what psychodramatic role it is, if the role is clear (please see the previous chapter for more on the five psychodramatic roles):

#### Types of Protagonist

**(p1)**—Present-Day Self  
**(p2)**—Past/Future/Transformed Self  
**(p3)**—The Hero/Heroine

#### Types of Auxiliary Ego

**(aux)**—Other characters in the drama  
*Special cases:*  
**Director**—The Inner Guide  
**Double**—The Truth-teller  
**Audience**—The Observer

In a typical psolodrama, the psoloist begins with authentic movement, then shares aloud what she is noticing (shared vipassana), then enters roles and dialogues (role stream

and scene stream), and then begins to develop an emerging conflict or theme, with the help of the psychodramatic roles (psolodrama). Experienced psoloists often skip one or more of these stages, moving from authentic movement fairly rapidly into psolodrama. Where evident, these stages are noted in the examples below.

When playing different roles, the psoloist typically shifts slightly or moves to an entirely different location in the space, as well as takes on a different posture, stance, etc., appropriate to the new role. (For the role of the double, the psoloist typically takes a step backward to represent her inner self and inner feelings.) For brevity, the examples below omit descriptions of these typical movements. Physical/vocal action is described in italics.

Finally, some of the examples below are followed by excerpts from the sharing process between psoloist and witness, and all are followed by commentary. The commentary is aimed not at psychological interpretation but rather at discussing psolodrama as a technique, e.g., how the drama evolved from the psoloist's awareness, movement, improvisation, etc. (For examples of how a therapist can use interpretation as a clinical tool when working with psolodrama, see Part IV, "Working with Individuals.")

### **Psolodrama Example #1: The Lone Hunter and the Sun King**

*(Authentic movement: the psoloist begins in child's pose, with forehead resting on the floor and body folded. He rests there, breathing.)*

*(Shared vipassana—speaking aloud:)*

**Protagonist (p1):** Sinking into the carpet. Dull head. Layers of dullness. Tension in left hip.

*(Rolling over onto back.)*

Cool air coming in through mouth. Feeling the arch of my back. Tingling of lower back on the floor. Butt. Scratching skin. Rubbing. A thought about self-care, and a wave, a little edge of sadness. Rubbing sternum. Rubbing heart. Who cares for me. Hearing the wind outside. Hearing a train coming. Rough face. Rough whiskers.

*(Role stream:)*

A wood man. A woodsman.

**Woodsman (p3):** Waking up on a cold morning in my shack. All alone. In the woods. Just me. I can do anything I want today. It's just me. It's me. No dog. No people. No family. No nothing. It's just me. By myself out here. Nah. Cold day. Cold day, but I've got my gun. And I've got my knife. Got my coat. Mmm. Gotta get outa bed. Go and hunt—something—to eat.

*(Scene stream:)*

**Protagonist:** Better than a bagel!

**Woodsman:** Who the fuck are you?

**Protagonist:** I'm present-day Walter. And a little bit in the mood for a toasted bagel, with margarine and cream cheese, maybe a slice of cheese. Lettuce, tomato. Could be good.

*(Psolodrama:)*

**Woodsman:** You're just a pampered fuck, aren't you? Do you know how to live? You just lead this kind of sheltered, pampered, boxed-in life. Every moment scheduled. You don't know anything about living. You're just all in your fucking head.

**Protagonist:** Well, you can say that but I'm responsible. I earn money, I have a family, I have a wife, I have three kids. Look at you. You're a waste product. You're just living for yourself. Only. You're just surviving. When you die no one will remember you, no one will care about you. What's the purpose of your life?

**Woodsman:** Ho-ho-ho! Yeah! You think that because you're responsible to wife and kids that you're worth something and I'm not. Nice. Nice. Fuck you. I'm present to my life. These four little walls. These woods. The stream. The mountains. The animals that I kill. I'm there for all of it. I see all of it. I feel all of it. I revel in the blood. And smell the blood. I cook the meat and the fat. I take it in. I don't need to justify my life. I don't need a reason for living. I am fucking alive. That's all that matters. Just living this moment is all that matters. This essence—it's essential—you've lost that completely. You're on the fucking treadmill. You don't know what the fuck you're doing. You just are vaguely worried about the future. I'm the future. I'm here now, where there is no future. Ha. Kill or be killed. It's very simple. This is what life is.

**Protagonist:** Very compelling. Very compelling you are. I admire your macho independent nature. But I gotta say you look really lonely to me. I mean I just get such joy out of my children. Cuddling my son. Seeing the three of them grow. Yeah. I feel very lucky. I don't feel boxed in. Sure I'm very scheduled. But I get to do amazing things. I love the things that I do. Not always. But do you always love the things that you do—do you love waking up in a cold shack? You know, life has ups and downs. But you know I'd rather be here, frankly, than where you are.

*(From this point the Woodsman seems to shift more into an auxiliary ego role.)*

**Woodsman (aux):** Would you really? Then why am I here in your fucking psolodrama huh? Why am I here? I'm here because I AM LIFE. Ah! And meat. Yes. I'm here because you're missing some essence in your gut. You're living too fucking an intellectualized life! In your fucking head. That's why I'm here—to shake you the fuck up! So you better get used to the idea. I'm gonna shake you up. I'm shaking you!—I'M SHAKING YOU! *(Shakes the protagonist with both hands.)*

**Protagonist:** DAH! Stop shaking me! Get your fuckin' hands off me. I'm fine with my life. Do I have to defend my fucking life to you? Jesus. God. I'm getting attacked on all sides.

**Wife (aux):** Walter! Yes, you need to go to bed early. But Walter you need to stay up late with *me*.

**Child 1 (aux):** Daddy daddy! Can you play with me? Can you read to me? Daddy!

**Child 2 (aux):** Daddy can you hug me? Can I hug and smooch you, Daddy?

**Child 3 (aux):** Daddy daddy we wanna come in. We wanna come in and be with you Daddy!

**Child 2:** Daddy daddy I wanna come in and be with you *now!* Margaret *no!!*

**Protagonist:** OK, everybody, whooooa! Wow. What a life. Mmmmm. Big beautiful life. Mmm. Smells like...a burning smell? Cooking rice? Interesting. Someone cooking rice next door? OK, never mind.

**Woodsman:** See that's it. That's it you fuck. You're ruled by fear. You're ruled by the interruptions of others. Do you know what it means to have an independent moment in your fucking life? Do you know what it means? I can feel my muscles. I can feel my struggle with another creature, to kill it. I can plunge my knife into the flesh of another creature and kill it. With you, if you touch your own hand you feel weak and you've hurt yourself.

**Protagonist:** Oh, God, this critique is amazing! Like, did I ask for you? Did I? Like where the fuck are you coming from? I...you know, you're making me say that I am happy. What if I want to say that I'm depressed?

**Double:** *(curled up on floor, head buried under arms)* I'm depressed. Oh, I'm so depressed! Oh God, oh I'm so depressed. Oh...ho...I admit defeat. I'm nothing. I'm worthless. I'm a crappy father. Husband. Crappy designer. Crappy spiritual leader. Crappy person. Crappy son. Crappy brother. I'm crap, crap. I'm a ball of reactivity and anger. I'm comparing myself all the time and coming up short. I've

not planned for my future. I've no time to get anything done. I'm failing everyone. I'm a crappy employee. I'm a crappy crap crap. I'm crap in all departments.

**Protagonist:** *(standing)* Director is this really true?

**Director:** Well how do you feel? How do you feel when you take it in?

**Protagonist:** Yeah. Yeah it resonates. This is my inner life, so much. There's just a huge amount of self-judgment, and a huge amount of not-self-acceptance. *(laughs)* Just complete non-self-acceptance! It's like every day, every moment, I cannot accept what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. And very few victories and triumphs it seems. Mostly just a downward spiral of crap.

**Director:** Hmm. So... If you could have anyone enter your psolodrama right now, who would it be?

**Protagonist:** *(claps)* I could have anyone enter... The Sun King. Mmmm.

*(The psoloist moves to one end of the space and transforms into the Sun King. He stands upright, slowly lifting his arms, taking up more space. He begins to enter, very slowly, while making a sound of rushing air, a rumbling, approaching storm, increasing in volume. He begins to sing, very slowly. He sings all of his lines, in a style between Gregorian chant and opera.)*

**Sun King (aux):** *Radiating sun, light and heat, wherever I stride.*

*(Air sounds.)*

*I am the Sun King.*

*Filling the world with light and heat.*

*Bringing clarity, wisdom and reason, as well as brotherly love.  
Bringing the goodness of parental love, spousal love and caring.  
I am the Sun King, the generator of life, growth.  
I am the Sun King.  
Landing on earth to spread warmth out to all creatures,  
All the peoples.  
What do you want to say to me?*

**Protagonist:**

Oh, Sun King, *(chuckling sadly)* there's a lot of shadow in my life. I judge myself every moment. A lot of fear! And a lot of making myself wrong. A lot of mistakes and beating myself for the mistakes. *(Hits himself with his fists.)* Sun King, what am I doing wrong? Why has my spiritual practice not helped me?!? Why has growing up not helped me? Why am I still the same neurotic idiot that I was 20, 30, a million years ago? What—what is this?

**Sun King:**

*Yes. Life on earth has light and shadow.  
You can choose to dwell in the shadow,  
And not experience my warmth, light, and heat.  
You can choose to hide from me,  
Curl up on yourself underneath a stone.  
You can choose to burrow into holes and run away from me.  
But I will say, don't do it (claps) don't do it.  
Come back to the light.  
Don't hide yourself in the shadow of self-defeat and misery.  
Come back (claps) to the light, come back to the light of day.  
See what is good in yourself and others, reach for the light,  
Reach for the warmth, connection is all that we have:  
Energy.  
You can waste lots of energy by folding onto yourself like that.*

*There is no use—instead create, and love.  
Spread light, and warmth,  
You can be a Sun King.*

**Protagonist:**

I hear you. I can recognize when I'm folding in on myself. When I'm hiding in shadows and in burrows. Driving myself insane with shadow thoughts and questions. Can I just be honest with everyone? Can I just communicate love and caring? Can I admit to my mistakes, be honest and move on? Can I communicate with Mary, and Patricia, and Linda, and everyone in my life that I'm feeling something incomplete with—clear it, and move on with strength, and love, honesty and joy. Can I do that? Hmmm.  
*(laughs)* Question: how do I clear with this shadow of comparison: Islam, Christianity, Barbara, Dennis... All these people and approaches that I compare myself with, life approaches, philosophical approaches, how do I clear that, Sun King?

**Sun King:**

*Life on earth is hard.  
It can feel like a pile of ants and bugs,  
Crawling on top of one another  
To reach the summit.  
Don't buy into such nonsense.  
A single mite can walk out into the sun,  
Absorb my light and heat,  
And fill with joy and pleasure of being alive!  
Do not buy into the rat race, the rat heap,  
The clawing, the striving.  
Let GO!  
There are a million billion billion trillion creatures  
On this small planet and each has a flame,*

*From the sun, from the stars.  
Each flame is a torch, and each torch is a star, and  
Each star is exploding with LIFE!  
Create, creativity, passion, excitement,  
Building and loving  
Contributing, lifting ALL UP!  
Do not worry, do not compare.  
To compare is fear—  
(Growing quieter:)  
And fear is shadow  
And the shadows will pull you down.  
Don't let them.*

**Protagonist:** I want to bring back this guy at the beginning. And I want to say to this guy: I love you. I love you and appreciate you. And all your violence. Your impulses to kill. I love you. I'm so glad that you're alive, I'm so glad that you're in me. I embrace you (*claps*) man to man. (*Embraces the Woodsmen, hard.*) UH! To feel strength and strength. YES BROTHER! (*Claps his back, hard.*) UH! YES!

**Woodsmen:** Thank you brother for recognizing me! Thank you brother for recognizing *me*. I see that you are a man. I may not understand your life but I see you can stand up and be a man. Give me your hand. CUT IT! (*Cuts with knife.*)

**Protagonist:** AAH!! GOD THAT hurts. OK, great. (*Clapping hands several times.*) Thank you. Mm. Thank you so much. Thank you so much. I will keep this wound to remember you by. I want you to stay with me. I'm gonna cut your hand too. (*Does it.*)

**Woodsman:** BUH—DUH!! All right! Hand to hand! Let's do it—blood brothers.  
*(They clasp cut hands.)*

**Protagonist:** Here is to loving and acknowledging our strength, our inner warrior, the capacity for violence and killing, putting it to good use, harnessing this passion in our lives. Yes: harnessing this passion in my life. This passion to kill. This passion to love. All the passions—harnessing them, to be happy, to be passionate, to love my family, to love everyone. Thank you. Thank you. Mmmm.

### Excerpts from the Sharing Process

**Psoloist:** When I played the Woodsman, it felt analogous to meditation. What if this sense in meditation of being alone was extended to all of life? If I were just alone—really alone—in nature, what would I be like? What would I have to be, or become? Something about that character is so freeing—no expectations of anyone else on him, can live completely authentically. And I just so reveled in that. Interesting when he became a kind of critic for me, the protagonist.

It felt very odd to reverse roles and become me. Whenever I became me and spoke in my voice I kept thinking, I'm so in my head, effeminate, speaking like an intellectual. It's a little bit like when black comedians do an impression of a white guy, that's how I felt when I was becoming present-day Walter compared to the Woodsman. I felt like this intellectualized person justifying himself and it felt quite hollow. Sometimes I got some good points in—as it went on I felt less hollow. But there was definitely a feeling of “who is the protagonist here?” If I'm feeling more “real” as the mountain man in the shack, is he really the protagonist and present day Walter is an apparition...?

This loops to the end of the psolodrama when they become blood brothers. I merged with him, basically—loving him and taking in all the good aspects of who he is. I love that ending, integrating this split off part, this very masculine self. A masculine self who is using anger in a constructive way rather than the crappy ways it can leak out on a daily or weekly basis in my life. Little petty family frustrations or work frustrations. Anger leaks out, in an uncomfortable, indirect way—not a helpful way.

Whereas the Woodsman can take and channel his aggression and strength into killing, for food. Something about it seems so right on and clean. His world is kill or be killed. And so, any anger he's got is just immediately channeled into appropriate aggression, violence, killing, and in his reality that's great.

So, one thing I'm taking from that is, if I'm merging with him: can I find appropriate channels/outlets for my strength, masculinity, aggression? One answer is drama therapy: I end up playing these kinds of characters—a drug-addled oversexed musician, this Woodsman, a pig in the mud—many different characters that represent all of these masculine parts—that in modern life have to be heavily edited out, it feels, or it seems. I have fewer outlets than most because, for whatever reason, I'm not out there engaging in sports. I'm not working that out on the basketball court or paddling on a river. Parenthetically, it would be very helpful to do more sports, so I can be in better shape and channel some of that good strength, aggression, and energy into those activities.

**Witness:** I wanted to bring up this other character of the Sun King—his singing, shedding light and heat everywhere with reason and love, all the good things that were emanating from him. It was quite a remarkable dialogue, when you asked the Sun King,

how do you deal with these patterns in your life. It seems you got a pretty good answer, which is to recognize these as shadows—shadow states—and don't indulge in them but come out of the shadow. This image of competition on earth and all these bugs piled up in a heap to reach the top, and realizing how ridiculous that is, that a bug can just crawl out onto the dirt, and be in the sun, and feel the joy.

**Psoloist:** With the Sun King, there's something about confronting a character who is just good. In the face of that much goodness, light, strength—a very different kind of strength, it's so interesting to hold him up next to the Woodsman. They are two faces of male strength—the Sun King saying “we can be a force for goodness” and the mountain man going “Fuck you all! I love my violence and aggression.” I can get something out of each of those. There was a beautiful sequence with the Sun King where I could reflect on “oh, where am I out of whack?” with various people in my life and can I clean that up. Because in the face of this much light and love there's no room for dilly-dallying and squirming around in the shadows—can I just say what's on my mind and move on. Open, honest communication, even by email.

### Commentary

In this as in all psolodramas, the psoloist enters empty with no idea of what is to come. The subject of the psolodrama arises organically from the preliminaries: authentic movement, shared vipassana, role stream, and scene stream. What emerges in these phases, seemingly haphazardly, merges into the forming psolodrama. During this process of emergence and merging, the psoloist is unsure of where he is going. As roles emerge and begin to speak, the psoloist is following the thread of what is emerging, doing his best to stay open to each unfolding role, while listening for inner impulse—his inner

desire to respond, change, move, find a new role, shift to a new scene, etc. The psoloist is “being moved” in the authentic movement sense, while fulfilling his “act hunger” in the psychodramatic sense.

We also see in this example something else common to psolodrama in general, the emergence of archetypal roles—here exemplified by the Woodsman and the Sun King. Such roles can be seen as unacknowledged parts of the self.

The Woodsman character develops from the psoloist’s physical position—lying on his back—as well as the sensation of feeling the rough stubble of his own unshaven face. The Woodsman embodies a masculinity the psoloist cannot express in his daily life: reveling in aloneness, independence, hunting and killing, being close to nature, etc. Although initially the protagonist (p3), in dialogue with the present-day Walter (p1) the Woodsman becomes an auxiliary ego role, specifically, the antagonist, in this case a kind of inner critic.

When this inner critic pushes the protagonist to defend himself, the psoloist realizes that there is another voice inside and becomes the double, who can express the inner truths of depression, unhappiness, self-loathing, and hopelessness. Seeing this makes the protagonist seek out the director for advice, asking, “Director is this really true?”

The role of the director is to return the psoloist to action, ideally as rapidly as possible. Here, he does so by posing a question: “If you could have anyone enter your psolodrama right now, who would it be?” In that moment, the psoloist is facing toward the windows, the brightest source of light in the room. It is possible that the bright light in his eyes causes him to say “the sun” aloud; what causes him to add “king” is a mystery.

The Sun King moves in a slow and stately way, singing everything he says. Part of the power of psolodrama is that it is a physical and vocal form—the psoloist is not just speaking about the role, he is *becoming* the role; changing his physical state and expressing with his voice is causing him to feel and think in new ways. As he develops the role of Sun King, it is as if the psoloist is tapping into a higher wisdom, accessing his most wise, experienced, and generous self, or something beyond his “self.”

In the end, inspired by his interaction with the Sun King, the psoloist is moved to see the Woodsman again, to reclaim that split off, masculine part of himself, embracing and joining him as a brother. As is often the case in psolodrama, there is a progression from confronting a shadow figure, to becoming it—and thereby empathizing with it—and finally integrating it: a movement from anger or fear to greater understanding, openness, and ultimately, lovingkindness or *metta*.

## **Psolodrama Example #2: The Knife of Suffering and the Elfin Queen**

*(Authentic movement: the psoloist stands. Her body begins to shake.)*

*(Shared vipassana:)*

**Protagonist (p1):** I drop down into myself.

*(Collapsing toward the floor.)*

This is not a happy place. I’m falling!

Slipping and sliding. Dark, spiraling tube. Pulled down—feet first.

*(She grabs for the sides.)*

I can't catch hold of anything!

Expelled out. Light. Air.

I'm naked. Vulnerable. Light hurts my eyes.

*(Psolodrama. She crawls to a corner and cowers there.)*

I don't want to be a grown up!

Fear.

A knife plunges into my center.

*(She struggles to pull it out. With both hands and great effort, she extracts it.)*

**Knife (aux):**

I am the knife of suffering!

I am giant. Like a sword, powerful.

But I am nothing without my victim.

*(The knife begins to wither, its voice getting smaller.)*

I'm shrinking.

**Elfin Queen (p3):**     *(Standing, tall.)*

I am the elfin queen. I wear a gown. I am young, adolescent.

I am in a box. Open at the front. I minister to my subjects.

Where are my subjects?

**Knife:**                 *(small, a supplicant)*

My queen...please. Please take me back.

**Elfin Queen:**         *(pauses)*

I don't want to return to the enmeshed relationship we had, Knife of Suffering.

But I also realize I cannot banish you.

**Knife:**                 *(cutting)*

I will pry you out of that box!

*(The Queen emerges.)*

**Elfin Queen:**         I am older now, a woman. I am regal.

I feel the breezes, the air on my skin.

I am autonomous.

Knife, you can stay. I pulled you out of my heart the way Arthur pulled Excalibur from the stone. I cannot turn my back on you.

You can be my companion. Like a pet.

*(The Knife becomes a Monkey.)*

**Monkey (aux):** Ee-ee-ee!

*(The Elfin Queen reaches down with her right hand and takes the monkey's hand.)*

**Elfin Queen:** Energy tingling in my hand.

*(She lets the monkey go.)*

Energy rising up arm. Travelling across shoulders. Down to left hand.

*(She brings her hands together.)*

Ball of energy.

*(She holds it, and then absorbs it into her belly.)*

### Excerpts from the Sharing Process

**Psoloist:** The initial slide and expulsion felt like birth. The Knife of Suffering felt to me like a victim stance I'm stepping away from, or growing out of. I noticed there

were stages: first, as the adolescent Elfin Queen, I was inside a box, unable to take my own power. Then, as an adult, I broke out of the box, able to take action. I became an adult queen, growing into authority and self-will. I realized that to turn my back on the Knife of Suffering would be to turn my back on part of myself—perhaps my own vulnerability. Whatever it is, better to befriend it, especially since it doesn't appear to have the power it once had.

It strikes me that the young elfin queen's box is that of innocence, and only suffering will allow her to grow up—will let her emerge as an adult. So the knife cuts her out of the box.

### Commentary

The psoloist closes her eyes and begins to follow her body. Immediately, there is energy there, expressed as shaking. Progressing to shared vipassana, the psoloist speaks aloud what she is noticing: "I drop down into myself." This simultaneously describes a physical movement (the dropping down), a sensation (feeling the physical movement), an emotion or feeling (which could be relaxing, focusing in on her core/center, the dantian/hara), and an image, of going inside oneself.

As she collapses to the floor, the image transforms and takes on an emotional tone: "This is not a happy place. I'm falling!" The beginning of a psolodrama often parallels the start of a shamanic journey: the psoloist goes through a transition in which she leaves behind her normal day-to-day identity and reality, and enters a new role or state—the equivalent of the shamanic journeyer's entrance to the earth. As the psoloist focuses inward, opening to sensations, emotions, and inner imagery, entering this new state, present-day thoughts, cares, and worries fall away. In this psolodrama, the opening

image also echoes Alice's passage in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; an uncontrollable fall that opens the psoloist to a new reality. As the image develops—"slipping and sliding," "dark, spiraling tube," "pulled down—feet first," "expelled out, light, air," "I'm naked, vulnerable, light hurts my eyes"—it becomes a picture of birth, from the baby's viewpoint.

The psoloist improvises with the feeling of being a newborn, crawling into a corner to escape the vulnerability and light, and expresses a core theme of the emerging psolodrama: "I don't want to be a grown up!" Throughout the psolodrama, the psoloist stays open to her impulse to change and evolve in this protagonist role (later called the Elfin Queen), portraying her as "young, adolescent," and later as "older...a woman...regal." This attitude of openness—to impulse, to change, and specifically to allowing a role to learn, evolve, and grow over the course of a drama—is central to psolodrama.

It is also through openness to impulse that an auxiliary ego is introduced. The psoloist first feels fear of growing up, a fear which she embodies in the form of a knife plunging into her center. As she pulls the knife out, she *becomes* the knife, speaking as it. The knife announces its own name: "I am the knife of suffering!" As in classic psychodrama, role reversal is one of the most potent techniques in psolodrama. In this example, by reversing roles and becoming the knife, the psoloist opens up to learning about her suffering and empathizing with it. In addition, by embodying the suffering as a role (rather than just talking about it), she can dialogue with it and by doing so explore her changing relationship with it over time.

Because psolodrama is based in authentic movement, there is a physical and energetic self-awareness that is a very strong part of the process. The psoloist may frequently pause, as she allows herself to feel what is happening in her body. Playing a role in psolodrama can sometimes be less a verbal experience, or plot-driven experience, than a visceral sensing of energy and emotion. It is through her body that the psoloist feels a satisfying completion to this drama, allowing the energy from the auxiliary (the knife, now transformed into a monkey) to travel through her body, becoming a ball of energy that she absorbs into her belly. The arc of a psolodrama often has a physical or emotional logic that can transcend rational explanation. Here the final moment echoes the initial stab of fear by the knife into her center; what was previously suffering has been transformed into a feeling of completion or wholeness that the psoloist experiences viscerally.

### **Psolodrama Example #3: The Family Business**

*(Authentic movement: the psoloist sits on the floor and begins to lean to one side. He lies on the floor, then begins to roll from one side to the other, continuously moving.)*

*(Shared vipassana:)*

**Protagonist (p1):** Tingling fingers. Breath. Relief. Move. Sit too fucking much.

*(Psolodrama:)*

Am I really an emotional whore? Do I enjoy being an emotional whore?

Lewd images. Clients crawling up my staircase to crawl into my vagina, to crawl into me. How many can I fit in there? Open legs. Come in—in through my vagina—into my heart—they take up residence there and sit there. Come into my womb room. Leave pointy objects outside. It's delicate in here. Come sit in my womb room and grow and I'll just be here. I want to give birth to all these fucking clients with their fucking umbilical cords in me!

**Audience:** You're so fucking passive! You really just sit there? C'mon, give me a break! Where's the father—where's Dad?

*(walking as an old man, slightly bent over)*

**Dad (aux):** I'm an old man. Dad is old. Dad falls down and breaks ribs. Walks with walker. Dad is clear consciousness, totally clear. And he's dying. I am Dad. My knees hurt and I can't sleep. I see clearly and I can't walk. I need an oxygen tank to breathe...my diaphragm doesn't work...

**Audience:** What do you have to say about all these clients sitting in his womb? About him trying to save the world? Some have seen him 15 years, some 20!

**Protagonist:** They're just not ready. The soul just takes a long time to grow...

**Audience:** Where is Dad in all this? What would he say?

**Dad:** If that's how you want to spend your time, OK. It's not a bad use of your time... Does it change or save the world? Clearly you've helped some people. Could be good, could be bad, I don't know...

The important thing is, did you do it beautifully? Was it elegant?  
Did it sing?

It's the wrong question "did it save the world?" Fuck that question!

**Protagonist:** Finally someone is making some sense around here!

**Dad:** I'm not a guru. I'm 87. I may not be around much longer. But that's the question: Is it beautiful?

*(To himself:)* Fucking knees and walker. But without it I can't balance. So I need the walker. It will all go on the junk heap soon.

A question for the Buddha: what happens to your energy when you die? When your freakin' knees don't work anymore. When you're back in the ground. When you're shit!

**Protagonist:** I don't know the answer to that question. All I know is that people come up the stairs, to this womb. They come up the stairs with a bag of shit. And I say "what are you going to do about that shit?"

**Client (aux):** That's why I'm here! For you to tell me!

**Protagonist:** Let's take it out and look at it. Nice shit. Rotting, old socks, women's panties.

**Client:** I'm ashamed of my bag of shit. I made my boyfriend promise to throw it in the dumpster if I die. Look at this! Handcuffs, a whip, letters from my high-school teacher— yeah that's right, the one that I gave blow jobs to. My cooker from when I used to shoot up. And my dildo collection. Why the fuck did I bring it here to show you! What the fuck do you know about pain! You asshole—I never should have brought this stuff here. Why don't you take one of those dildos and stick it up your ass!

**Dad:** Rough guy, huh? Think you got to him? Think you connected? Did you find something beautiful there?

**Protagonist:** It took him more than 10 years to bring that bag in. I thought he was just depressed. And he was a hot shot in the financial district. Conclusion: I don't know shit. In a more humble way: I really don't know...

**Dad:** So how many years have you spent doing this?

**Protagonist:** 30 years.

**Dad:** You're still wet behind the ears. I did it for 65. Now I'm dying. So you entered the family business. Maybe it's deep and profound... Maybe it's just the most interesting way to pass your time...

I've got a train to catch. Don't know if I'm coming back. Have a nice ride. It's been a nice ride with you.

Now, the question for me is, was it beautiful? Was this life beautiful? Was it a beautiful gesture? Sometimes it was, and sometimes it wasn't. Sometimes I was really awake in it, and sometimes not. Sometimes it was really clear and sometimes it was muddy as shit.

*(To protagonist:)* Did you have a good time? Being a womb for people?

I've got a train to catch. See you. Enjoy. I don't know what the next stop is on this train. Thank you for being my son this time around...

**Conductor (aux):** Tooooot! Tooooot! All aboard! Yeah you, with the walker and oxygen tank. We're going to the great beyond.

**Dad:** Goodbye.

### Commentary

Early in this psolodrama, the soloist externalizes the critic and turns it into a role, the audience. The audience in psolodrama can be any voice observing the drama and commenting on it—it can also be a supportive voice. In this case, the psoloist uses the stance of the audience to get the critical voice out of his head and into the drama, allowing him to move beyond the critic and let the story emerge. As is often the case with the audience, and any auxiliary ego role, by allowing it to speak it provides the impetus for action, helping the psoloist take the next step in his drama. In this case, the audience/critic repeatedly asks for the father—"Where is Dad in all this?" This helps the

psoloist break out of monologue as protagonist and explore different points of view, including those of his father and of a client.

## Final Thoughts

As we have seen in these examples, there are some features common to most psolodramas: the easy, natural mixing of fantasy and reality; the exploration of a core theme or problem; and the embodiment of an emotional state through imagery, role, and story.

Once someone is trained in psolodrama, the practice feels as natural as moving authentically. Entering a psolodrama can be like entering a warm, comfortable pool, where everything flows simply and intuitively.

As we shall see in the next chapter, there are a few sticking points that can hinder those new to the practice. With training and coaching, however, obstacles can be overcome, leading to an immensely satisfying and enriching practice.