

Ronnie Felton

A Drumming a Day keeps the Doctor away

I was starting to get tired of looking after the cows. Twelve days had passed since I first came to visit Rosa Coyful, and the only thing that I had managed was to be entrusted with looking after her herd of cows. It is true that this was an important task, only four weeks ago two of her nineteen cows had drowned in the nearby swamp; but looking after her cows was not helping me to learn anything about the traditional Mapuche healing techniques.

Rosa Coyful was about 45 or 50. She lived alone in a little hut on the top of a hill and had been living alone for the last five years since her brother died. It is not easy for a woman alone to survive in this countryside and even though Rosa was a well-known *Machi* in that area, she had to struggle hard to make a living, looking after cattle and growing wheat and corn. I was visiting the area for the third time engaged on research about healing practices amongst the Mapuche Indians, when one of the members of the family I was staying with suggested that I pay a visit to Rosa. The hill where she lived was only sixteen kilometres away from the house where I was staying, a moderate three hours walk. As I was not doing anything else productive and had built up sufficient confidence in the Mapuche language I decided to try my luck, and armed with several bags of sugar - a product greatly valued by the Indians of the region - I directed my steps towards Rosa's house.

As usual in that area, my approach to the house was greeted by a pack of six or eight dogs howling and barking at the top of their voices. Although I knew this was the normal thing, the sound of six or eight dogs jumping around me and barking still managed to send a few shivers down my spine. I walked slowly trying not to seem afraid and sat down on a tree trunk not far from the house. A few minutes past and the barking continued; eventually Rosa came out of the house. She was carrying a broomstick in her right hand and shouting, she chased away the dogs as she approached me: 'Come on get away from here, get off'. She walked slowly towards me and in broken Spanish said 'Good afternoon, what is your business here?'

'Mari mari' I answered in my best Mapuche. 'Manuel Huenolao sent me with his regards'. I was speaking half in Spanish and half in Mapuche, trying my best to show that I really valued her language, something that most other Huinkas (white man - thief) would not take the trouble to do.

'I hear that you are a Machi and I am very interested in Machis and in the way they heal people'.

Rosa walked around the garden brushing away some fallen leaves with her broom. She did not face me as she answered as though she were mumbling to herself: 'Yes I am a Machi but that is our matter, a matter for Mapuches'.

It took me the best part of two hours to try and explain to Rosa that I was not there out of mere touristic curiosity, but that I was genuinely interested in her system of healing and in the possibility of learning the way in which she healed other people. All this conversation took place as we were both sitting on a tree trunk outside her house. Although the usual custom would have been for her to invite me into the house to drink a cup of Mate or coffee with her, we sat there until it began to get dark. While the sun was setting, Rosa was telling me about the difficulties a woman of her age had trying to look after cattle. Two of her best cows had drowned in the swamps only a few weeks ago. I immediately grasped the opportunity and offered my help to look after her cows. 'Are you sure that that is what you really want?' she asked. 'Yes if that will enable me to be with you and perhaps learn some of your healing techniques'.

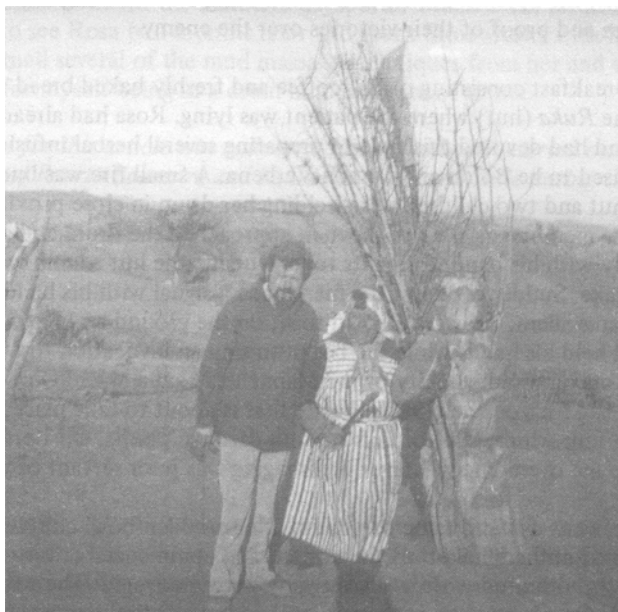
Twelve days had passed since that conversation took place, I had been sleeping in one of the outer barns and was only invited into the house for meals which I shared with Rosa, surrounded by six or seven of her dogs. She had not been very communicative during this period and most of her communication related to technicalities concerning the cows or occasional repairs that she was trying to make to the house.

I was starting to get bored of looking after cows, when on the twelfth day Rosa approached the hill where I was sitting under the shadow of a tree reading a book, and shouted: 'Hey you mister'. I turned my head and saw her beckoning me with her hand to come towards where she was standing. I shrugged my shoulders as though asking 'what is it that you want?' She continued beckoning me and I walked towards her. When I came next to her she said: 'I have been called to see a person that is very bad (she used the Spanish word *mal*, which means both sick and evil). My heart leaped in its chest but I dared not ask her if I could come with her. She continued: 'Come along, we have got about three hours to walk if we want to get there today'. The matter of fact way in which she issued her invitation for me to come along surprised me enormously. I ran to the house to collect my jacket and some dried meat to chew on the journey. Rosa was already on the road walking steadily, followed by her dogs.

A few hours later we arrived at a group of huts. Three men had come out with horses to meet us. They looked at me with great surprise and Rosa quickly explained that I was a Huinka interested in Machi things and that I had been staying with her over the last few days, the explanation seemed to satisfy them and they no longer paid any special attention to myself.

The sick man was lying on a side of the Ruka (traditional hut). He was naked and covered by a blanket. He must have been about twenty-six years old, small, heavily built and his nose was extremely red. He was shivering. Rosa walked towards him, sprinkled him with a few drops of water and then gazed deeply into his eyes for several minutes. She took a rattle out of her bag and began gently and monotonously to shake the rattle up and down his body as she hummed a chant. She then asked for his clothes to be brought and taking them in her arms she walked out of the hut and placed them in the sun. She continued to shake the rattle for several minutes and I could see that a powerful trance was starting to overcome her. She turned once again facing the clothes and stood there staring at them. After what seemed to be along long time, Rosa walked away from the clothes and entered the hut. We all followed and saw her as she

placed her hands, while still remaining in the state of trance, on the forehead of the patient. Chanting very gently, Rosa informed us that the patient was possessed by a *Wekufuy*, a powerful devil that she would have to cast out. Approaching the head of the family Rosa requested that arrangements should be made for an exorcism ritual, *Pewotun*, to take place the following morning. She asked for a lamb to be brought and several different containers, and at the same time a child was sent off on horseback to fetch her *Kultrun*, ritual drum, essential in any important ceremony in which the Machi takes place.



That evening over a cup of *Mate*, Rosa explained to me that the devil that had possessed this particular patient was a *Witralthue* (*Witr*an body and *alhue* means standing up or visitor). It was explained to me that a *Witralthue* is usually in the service of a *Kalku*, an evil sorcerer who might be living amidst the community. The *Kalku* resuscitates by means of black magic somebody who has died of Tuberculosis and uses him as his servant to perform his evil deeds. As a reward for his services, the *Witralthue* has to be fed with human flesh, preferably the flesh of a member of the *Kalku's* own family. Rosa suspected that one of the people present in the hut today was a *Kalku* but would not tell me who she suspected of being the evil sorcerer. She announced with great pompousness that a great battle between herself and the forces of evil would take place tomorrow and she warned me that if I would feel frightened I had better leave because my fear would be interpreted as weakness of somebody in her camp, and therefore would be acting against her. At this moment I stopped to reflect about what I was feeling and noted that I genuinely was not afraid. In a way all these stories seemed too far fetched and too far from my own reality to even be believed.

Nevertheless I had decided to try and be as objective as possible in the research I was carrying out and therefore just assured Rosa that I was not feeling frightened and that she could trust that my presence would not weaken her side in the battle that was awaiting her.

The following morning I was woken up by the sound of bugles playing military reveilles. It has been customary for nearly two hundred years now amongst the *Mapuche* to play military-style bugles before any important ceremony. The custom dates from the time when young Mapuche warriors would come back from their campaigns against the Spanish armies and would bring back the bugles of the Spanish army as trophies and proof of their victories over the enemy.

After a quick breakfast consisting of hot coffee and freshly baked bread we all assembled in the *Ruka* (hut) where the patient was lying. Rosa had already been up for several hours and had devoted this time to preparing several herbal infusions, one of which I recognised to be Boldo and Lemon Verbena. A small fire was burning in the middle of the hut and two children were holding her drum in close proximity to the flame tensing its membranes. One of the men approached the drum and started striking it gently with his hand testing its tone. Outside the hut a lamb was brought and tied to a stake. Suddenly one of the men made a signal with his hand and everybody became silent. We were all told to sit on the ground and Rosa approached the patient and held his hands while she began to sing an invocation to *Um/kuse Um/fucha*, the maximum dual deity of the Mapuche. 'I am a Machi Oh Lord, I am your servant, I beg for your help in the battle that is about to take place, I invoke thee Oh Lord of the four winds, Oh Lord of the four cardinal points, Oh Lord of the four colours, to help me overcome whatever is damaging this poor servant of yours'.

The Machi then went out and came back with a big wooden bowl containing freshly made mud. She took the blanket off the patient and commenced covering his entire body with this smooth mud without leaving any part uncovered. The patient seemed very pleasantly relaxed. As soon as the patient had been entirely covered in mud, Rosa walked over and picked up her drum and began gently beating with a stick. Then approaching the patient she listened to his heart beat and continued beating the drum, this time as to imitate the rhythm of his heart-beat. Her singing became more and more rhythmical and I could see how gradually Rosa was once again entering into a state of trance; but this time also her patient seemed to be overcome by a kind of stupor and I could feel very clearly how they were both in this trance together, as though an extra link had been created between the Machi and the possessed person. The old woman commenced now beating her drum more furiously; she placed the drum at the beginning of the patient's legs and began beating upwards towards the direction of his heart. She did this for the other leg, his arms, his head and his stomach, beating all the time towards the heart. After this, whilst continuing in a state of trance and chanting gently, she removed the mud from above the patient's heart and carried this out with her and placed it on the head of the lamb that was tied to the stake. One of the adult men went out and slaughtered the lamb by slitting its throat with a knife. The blood was collected in a vessel and given to the patient to drink. The lamb's heart was ripped out and buried in a deep hole in the ground, whereas the rest of the lamb was taken away to be roasted and eaten by all of us. The patient was then

given to drink several herbal infusions by the Machi and two other older women of the community. By this time the patient was wide awake and seemed to be feeling much better than when we had seen him originally the day before.

The following day we returned to Rosa's house. She assured me that she had clearly seen the *Witralthue* depart from the patient's body and that his sickness would no longer return; she seemed quite confident about this. I never had the opportunity to return and visit this particular patient and therefore do not know what has become of him. I also do not have a clear idea of what his original symptoms were. For me it was now back to the cows for the next five days, after which I was returning to the city. I came back to see Rosa two months later and spent three weeks with her in which I actually learned several of the mud massage techniques from her and was able to experience for myself being in a drum induced state of trance.

The material for this article was collected during fieldwork carried out by the author in the areas of Puerto Saavedra and Huillio in Southern Chile during the years 1974 and 1975.

Nick Owen

Drama Therapy -

A paper read at AHP drama therapy day Feb. 28th 1976 -

What is drama therapy? I've been asked this by quite a number of people recently who have not been involved with any form of therapy and who had no experience of drama outside a theatre setting. I've also been asked the same question by people who practice drama therapy and who have been involved with it for some time. It's not the sort of question one can give an easy answer to. I am not going to give one, but I hope to explain why not, and at least differentiate it from what it is not. I am anxious not to impose boundaries that are likely to be misplaced and misleading. Instead I shall talk a little of its origins and background and then contrast its orientation and emphases with other related methods of therapy.

The twin roots of drama, as I know them, are in the work of J.L. Moreno, the American psychologist who has given us the word 'psychodrama', and the Russian theatre director Stanislavski. Both these men were working out their ideas in the first two decades of this century, giving drama as a therapeutic tool a longer pedigree than might have been thought. It was Aristotle who brought to our attention the therapeutic value of drama for an audience through a purging of the emotions; what Freud called catharsis. But it was Moreno who turned this around, investigating catharsis in the ordinary people of the audience through an acting through of their own life problem situations. Here I should like to quote from a paper by Moreno called '*Mental Catharsis and Psychodrama*' printed in Ira Greenbergs' anthology of writing called simply '*Psychodrama, Theory and Therapy.*'