

# *Dramatherapy*

## *Theory and practice 2*

*Edited by Sue Jennings*



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# Dramatherapy

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Dramatherapy continues to grow and develop, and is now well-established as a profession and as a therapeutic intervention, especially in Europe and the USA. *Dramatherapy: Theory and Practice 2* provides both clinician and theatre artist with a stimulating overview of the most recent developments.

The international contributors offer a wide variety of perspectives from contrasting theoretical backgrounds, showing how it is possible to integrate a dramatherapeutic approach into many different ways of working towards mental health. They describe the practical application of dramatherapy in many different areas and provide an easily-grasped theoretical understanding of the basic principles and concepts involved. In particular, they discuss work with individuals as well as groups, and stress the importance of staff and patient settings. They also look at dramatherapy in relation to playtherapy, and consider the potential of dramatherapy in the community at large.

As a sequel to Sue Jennings's earlier book *Dramatherapy: Theory and Practice 1* (Routledge 1987), which has become an established text, this new book will be essential reading for all dramatherapists in training or practice. Professionals in health and social services, education and probation will find it relevant to their practice and thinking, as will theatre performers and directors.

**Sue Jennings** has worked in the theatre and in dramatherapy for nearly thirty years and is an internationally known expert on the subject.

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# Dramatherapy

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## Theory and practice 2

Edited by Sue Jennings

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**Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

To all theatre artists and therapists who believe in the  
theatre as a place of healing

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# Contributors

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**Roger Grainger**, DD, PhD, MPhil, was an actor before becoming a priest. He has written about mental illness and human life crises, and his latest book embodies research into the use of dramatherapy for healing thought-disorder. Besides being a registered dramatherapist, he holds doctorates in sociology, theology and divinity. Revd. Grainger is also a hospital chaplain.

**David Holt**, after eleven years in book and newspaper publishing, in 1966 at the age of 40 graduated from the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich with a thesis on 'Persona and actor'. From 1971 to 1982 he taught at the Westminster Pastoral Foundation where he introduced the Counselling and Ontology course. He is presently chairman of the C.G. Jung Analytical Psychology Club in London.

**Sue Jennings**, PhD, LRAM, LGSM, RDT, (Editor) has developed the theory and practice of dramatherapy for almost thirty years, and is the author of many books on the subject. She is director of the Institute of Dramatherapy. She is senior research fellow, currently conducting research with people with fertility

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**Steve Mitchell**, Dip. DTh, came into dramatherapy from the professional theatre, where he worked as a director for many years. He is a dramatherapist at Lancaster Moor Hospital, working with in-patients and out-patients, and is deputy training director at the Institute of Dramatherapy. He also teaches in Athens and Salonika. He is creative director of Pathfinder Therapeutic Theatre.

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**Bella Shepher**, BA, was born in Poland where she spent World War II under Nazi occupation and then lived in the Soviet Union. Having come to Palestine alone, she was brought up in a kibbutz. She studied stage directing and psychology at the University of Tel Aviv and now works as a psychotherapist in the mental health centre at Tzefat. She is a member of the kibbutz at Ayeleth Hashahar.

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I would like to thank all the people who in seen and unseen ways have contributed to the inception, creation and final production of this book. All the contributors deserve my special thanks for their original ideas and working to deadlines.

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Pauline Sands and everyone at Routledge, including Edwina Welham, have assisted me in so many practical ways.

Andy, Ros and Hal Hickson, my theatrical children have stimulated me in so many ways and always sustained me to the end.

I have received a lot of personal support and encouragement from Audrey Hillyar, Clare Higgins and Robert Silman, my special thanks to them.

Sue Jennings,  
Stratford-upon-Avon

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# Introduction

*Sue Jennings*

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Volume 2 of *Dramatherapy Theory and Practice*, like Volume 1, brings together twelve authors from very varied backgrounds to address the topic of dramatherapy. Whereas Volume 1 was mainly preoccupied with the application of dramatherapy with a range of client groups, this book moves the debate forward. It discusses new concepts and models of practice and brings art and science, and therefore theatre and therapy into a focused dialogue. It illustrates important underlying theoretical issues and pays attention to both assessment and research.

Most of the contributors are themselves dramatherapists or have otherwise had a long-term interest in the subject and wide experience of the artistic as well as the clinical.

For a background to the development of dramatherapy in the UK and the established training available, readers must turn to Volume 1. This book continues the dialogue and reflects on the rich nature of the subject that has now become established both as a profession and as a practice in the UK and USA as well as an increasing number of other countries. Dramatherapy, like theatre art, continues to grow and develop, particularly where human beings need assistance to transform their painful and destructive experiences into lives that contain hope and purpose.

The overriding principle behind arts therapies generally and dramatherapy in particular, is that the arts have always existed to communicate those things which otherwise cannot be expressed. Therefore arts therapies function in the same way for those people where the arts in themselves do not provide enough possibility for change. It is a sober thought that if as a society we were more aware of the role of the arts in preventative mental health, there would be far less need for arts therapists. If the theatre was central to our way of life and education, my contention is that dramatherapists would not be proliferating as they are now. The balance between art and science is now swinging in the wrong direction and I hope that there will be a change into a state of equilibrium where ritual, theatre and all the arts resume their necessary role in society as a whole.

The contributors to this book have all had a life involved with drama and

theatre either as participant or witness, and many have had careers in the theatre before becoming dramatherapists or practitioners in related fields.

Chapter 1 explores my own ideas in relation to the therapeutic implications of a Shakespeare play – in this instance, *King Lear*. Need one go further than Shakespeare for such a rich understanding of human beings and their worlds, couched within unique language and setting?

In Chapter 2 by Murray Cox, the concept of metaphor in the process of supervision is described with particular examples from forensic work. The very style of this chapter takes us on a creative journey of metaphor and image and brings into 'creative tension' the two worlds of forensic psychotherapy and dramatherapy.

Originally, Chapter 3 was to be a joint chapter written by Pat Watts and David Holt, but their material was so rich, that I asked them to separate into two chapters to give them more opportunity to develop their individual contributions. Pat Watts leads us through her own journey into drama and myth and she illustrates a crucial concept in dramatherapy, that of the embodiment of the character. David Holt, in Chapter 5, challenges our very language and the limitations of the terms drama and therapy and introduces the notions of enactment and behaviour.

Steve Mitchell, in Chapter 4, draws from his long experience in the theatre and introduces an artistic model, as contrasted with a clinical model of dramatherapy theory and practice.

The craft of dramatherapy is introduced by Ted Wharam in Chapter 6 where he focuses principally on his work with staff team-building in a clinical NHS setting.

Chapters 7 and 8 are major contributions by two leading drama therapists from the USA. Robert Landy writes on the application and underlying theory of working with individuals, a growing practice now in this work. David Read Johnson discusses in detail when it is appropriate for dramatherapists themselves to be 'in-role' in their work.

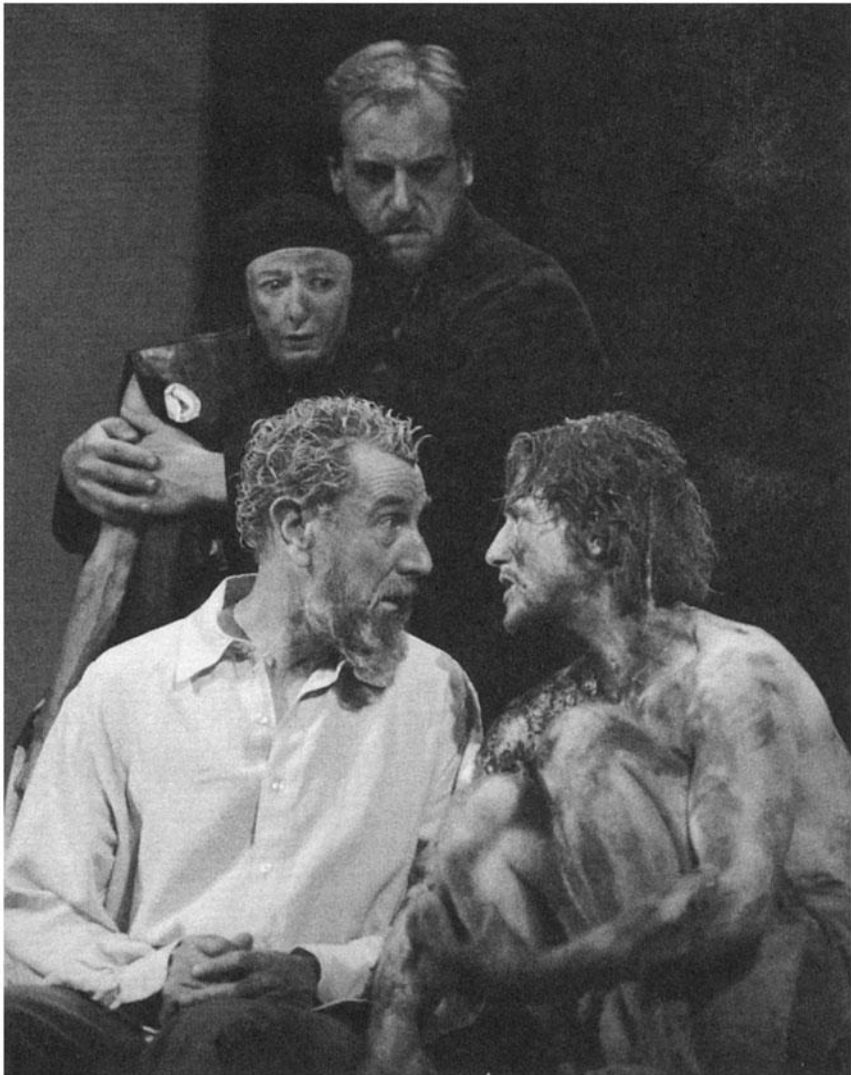
Ann Cattanach, in Chapter 9, demonstrates the links between playtherapy and dramatherapy in her work with children who have been abused. Too often these fields are seen as separate rather than having common roots and developmental processes.

Chapters 10 and 11 address the often neglected area of assessment and research. Mooli Lahad describes his tested method of assessment which can be used with children and adults. Roger Grainger describes how dramatherapy can be used to order thought with people who are thought disordered, using a conceptual framework of personal construct theory.

Finally Bella Shepherd looks at community drama and the relationship between actors and audience as a form of therapy for society.

This collection of chapters provides a unique way in to looking at dramatherapy from many perspectives. There is not one way of either thinking about it or practising it. Its very potency is that it is capable of so many forms and functions – just like the nature of theatre itself.

I hope that the dialogue between theatre and therapy and the underlying theories from both clinical and artistic worlds will continue to develop in such new and innovative ways.



*Figure 1.1* John Wood, David Troughton, Linus Roache and Linda Kerr Scott in Nicholas Hytner's production of *King Lear*, RSC, 1990 (Joe Cocks Studio)



## Chapter 1

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# 'Reason in madness'

## Therapeutic journeys through *King Lear*

*Sue Jennings*

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Dramatherapy is a means of bringing about change in individuals and groups through direct experience of theatre art. Although the techniques of drama are the means whereby this happens, it is the *process* of the theatre art form that is at the core of this experience. It allows participants and audience to step into dramatic reality from everyday reality, through which creation and re-creation is engendered in new and unexpected ways.

It is not enough for us to read or watch a play or a myth – however much this might engage and absorb us. It is the actual embodiment of the character and scenario which involves us physically in all our senses and thoughts. It allows both an inner expansion of experience and an outer clarification of perception.

As dramatherapists, we may work with people on the direct experiences of their own lives that are painful or unresolved; we may, through the drama, practise behaviours that are unhelpful or inappropriate. We may also take clients fully into the therapeutic theatre art, which establishes a dramatic or theatrical distance from their immediate experience in order to free other aspects of the self. It is indeed a paradox of dramatherapy that theatrical distance enables people to come closer and engage more profoundly with damaged or buried aspects of themselves.

Such a creative journey needs preparation, and most participants need to develop more fully their vocal and physical resources. Spontaneous drama of the moment, may well permit an imaginative leap into therapeutic exploration. However, time spent on the preparation through movement, voice, and drama games, allows a fuller engagement with the drama and brings about a flexibility of possibilities – a myriad of different journeys. Many therapeutic programmes already have drama activities which in themselves are health-promoting and enjoyable. Let us also see them as a means of preparation for a more major step forward into the drama. If human beings only explore within their own experience and with their limited and damaged selves, there is always a boundary on how far we can journey. Ultimately we still have limitations and wounds – even though there is some amelioration. But if we are also able to better equip ourselves for the journey, there are greater possibilities of going beyond the boundary into new and fertile land. It is comparable to people going on a skiing

holiday. With no initial preparation, physically or mentally, they may develop severe cramp and have to limp back to base, or they may feel they can only stay on the nursery slopes; they may push on resolutely, and then find that a dangerous fall makes it impossible to try again, or they may feel they can only stay within the safety of social events at the sports centre. The more difficult and complex the journey, the greater is the preparation needed.

What should the preparation entail? Vocal and physical techniques such as those in an actor's training are necessary. For the actor or performer of any kind, the human body is the instrument of experience and communication. The more it is expanded, the more the person can experience. It is not enough just to try these methods; as in any training, repetition in itself brings about greater freedom. Drama games<sup>1</sup> are an important way of learning control as well as developing the imagination. Young children play games and invent new ones spontaneously, and through them they learn body control, anticipation, danger and problem-solving. Drama games teach us about ritual – the repetition that provides security and the known base, and also the risk; the delightful danger of grandmother turning round to see if we have moved as we follow in her footsteps. I emphasise the importance of repetition in drama games and ritual, not only to provide the safety of the known, but also because it allows us to refine and perfect the experience.<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this chapter, I am taking the preparation outlined briefly above as a given, as a necessary way into more developed dramatherapeutic work. How then may we progress from the preparation for the journey to aspects of the journey itself?

The task I now set myself is: how can an understanding of a Shakespeare play assist a dramatherapist in practice? I propose to tackle the question by describing journeys through the play of *King Lear*, both in relation to several Lear productions and workshops, and also Lear images and themes that recur in dramatherapeutic work with groups and individuals. I maintain that an in-depth understanding of the play provides the dramatherapist with a wealth of archetypal material, as well as sharpening their responses to a plethora of imagery: indeed, *King Lear* is full of dramatic structures that can be directly applied in therapeutic work.

Over the years, *King Lear* has stimulated a vast amount of literary criticism and interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Each decade seems to bring about a new perspective on this great play. It is surely indicative of the play's greatness that it can continually harvest new understanding. Therefore, it is impossible to say that *King Lear* is about any one phenomenon; rather, it yields multiple crops of fruit, to which one can repeatedly say: 'and that's true too' (*King Lear*, V.ii:12).

As actor Linus Roache said in an interview about his performance of Edgar in Nicholas Hytner's 1990 RSC production of *King Lear*: 'there's no finite or definite way of doing it . . . The play will just go on and on and on . . . mining new truths from it.' (Jennings, 1990b).

The play of *King Lear* tells how Lear, aged King of England, intends to abdicate by dividing the kingdom between his three daughters. Unlike her sisters,

Cordelia, the youngest and Lear's favourite, cannot make a fulsome declaration of love for her father before the assembled court. In unreasoning rage, Lear rejects her, giving the whole kingdom to Goneril and Regan. The Earl of Kent is banished by Lear when he tries to intervene, but Cordelia, although without a dowry, is accepted in marriage by the King of France. Edmund, bastard son of the Earl of Gloucester, tricks his father into disinheriting the legitimate elder son, Edgar, who is forced into hiding disguised as a Bedlam beggar, Poor Tom. Kent has concealed himself as a soldier and remains with Lear's followers. Goneril and Regan, unwilling to support their father's large retinue, quarrel with Lear who rushes out into the night and storm with only his Fool and Kent. They meet the disguised Edgar before Lear is taken to Dover where Cordelia has landed with an army. Gloucester tries to help the king, but is betrayed by Edmund and has his eyes put out by Regan and her husband. In his blindness, Gloucester is led to Dover by Poor Tom, not recognising his own son. After the battle in which Lear and Cordelia are defeated, Edmund and Edgar fight a duel. Edmund is killed, but Cordelia, on his orders, has been hanged in prison. Lear dies trying to revive Cordelia.

## SIGNIFICANT THEMES

### Families

The play concerns the dynamics of two families, Lear and his three daughters, and Gloucester and his two sons. The families are linked by the fact that Lear is godfather to Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. Traditional readings of the play have usually portrayed Lear as a sad, misunderstood father, with an older and middle daughter who personify evil, and a younger daughter who is all that is good.

One interpretation of the play is that it is based on a Cinderella-like fairytale. If one takes the view that Lear is a fairytale or myth, then Lear's demand that his daughters should publicly state how much they love him – the public 'test' – is a mythic convention, recurring in many forms. However, recent productions have not set the play in such a convention, and thus Lear's demand may be seen as an unreasonable and manipulative request, taking place in the public domain of the political court. This latter interpretation appears equally valid, especially since there is no suggestion in the play that there is to be a 'test' of the daughter's love: indeed, Lear's stated intention (I.i:35-43) explicitly describes his political decision to divide the kingdom in order to prevent political strife, and to allow younger people to take responsibility for his realm.

The tone changes when Lear says: 'Which of you shall we say doth love us most?' (I.i:50).

Both the older and middle sister, Goneril and Regan, make an attempt to state their love, and Cordelia, the youngest daughter, stays silent. The reply of the older two daughters appears to satisfy their father, and Cordelia's silence

produces a torrent of words, anger and recrimination from him, which ends up in her being disinherited and disavowed. Even when others intervene, Lear pushes his resolve to the extreme and invokes the gods (the mysteries of Hecate and the Night, Apollo and Jupiter) to uphold his decision. So, having reacted with rage and abuse to Cordelia's silence or her unwillingness 'to play the game', he compounds his resolve by swearing to the gods, making his action inviolate.

In several workshops, we explored father/daughter relationships, taking single lines from Lear and then developing improvisation. We took the following lines: 'Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose' (I.i:35); and 'Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter' (I.i:54).

The improvisations ranged through a series of scenarios involving middle-aged daughters with aging fathers. Each time, the people who played the daughters ended up exasperated at the manipulation of the aging father: for example, one father attempted to persuade his daughter to allow him to move into an already overcrowded family home. He used as his persuasion the fact that he had already paid his daughter some of his savings in order to avoid tax. The daughter found herself, in the end, saying extreme things to her father in order to try and get him to understand, such as, 'Well, if you really can't look after yourself, we shall have to put you in a Home', and, 'Well that's it then, if we can't have a sensible conversation, I shan't come around anymore'. In reflection on the improvisations afterwards, many of the people who themselves worked with elderly people, commented that they had never realised how an irascible old man could push them to their limits. Rather than seeing Lear only as a poor old man to be pitied, they now felt that his behaviour was quite unreasonable. As the improvisations developed further, the above reactions carried over from the test of love, into the scenes where Lear goes to live with his eldest daughter and then attempts to move into his middle daughter's home. Again, Goneril felt that her father's behaviour in continuing to keep a retinue of many soldiers and giving orders to her household was unacceptable. In both the recent (1990/1) productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre, the soldiers are boisterous, noisy and very male. Goneril's exasperation seems a reasonable response to a feeling of being pushed beyond her limits.

The point of these explorations was not to suggest that either side was right or wrong, but to gain insight into the complex relationship between elderly parents and their children. It is particularly relevant to the contemporary context in which the nuclear family is seen as parents and dependent children rather than as three generations. The above described dynamic would probably not have come about several decades ago, where there was an expectation that children would care for their aging parents and that the aged parent would continue to play a dominant role in the running of the household.

The sub-text of another set of improvisations based on fathers and daughters, taking the lines 'What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent' (I.i:61,62), and 'Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, To love my father all' (I.i:101,102), moved on from the overt themes of Cordelia's unwillingness to state her filial

affection and Lear's verbiage in the public domain, to an examination of the nature of the relationship between Lear and his daughter. Many interpretations of the play make Cordelia very young, almost an Ophelia-figure, who, similarly, is a victim of her circumstances.

G. Wilson Knight (1949) suggests that the tragedy of this play is not Lear's, but Cordelia's, and that it is the tragedy 'par excellence of the innocent victim'. However, why is Cordelia still single and still living with her widowed father? She is obviously not a teenager, since Lear says he is 80, and one is forced to speculate on the seeming gross dependency between Cordelia and Lear. In one workshop, some of the improvisations went as far as to develop themes of incest and child sexual abuse; again, not a surprising theme in relation to our contemporary awareness and open discussion of child abuse, especially within families.

How far is Cordelia struggling to deal with the position of being the favourite child, still at home and looking after her aged father, and as yet not forming an adult peer/spouse relationship. As she attempts to speak, she is unable to say that all her love belongs to her father; some must surely be for her husband-to-be.

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
 They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,  
 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry  
 Half my love with him, half my care and duty:

(I.i:98–101)

Lear's banishment of Cordelia allows her to journey in her own right and later return stronger, independent, and changed – a personal rite-of-passage which I shall elaborate further in the next section.

As well as the dynamic of the Lear family, the sibling relationship of the three sisters provides therapeutic dynamite (as does of course Chekov's play *The Three Sisters*). Many readings of the play make the two older sisters, Goneril and Regan very similar: the personification of evil dressed in dark clothes. However, I am intrigued by the role of the middle sister, perhaps through being a middle sister myself, and I know that being neither the eldest nor the youngest and at times struggling to be one or the other, can produce many personal and familial conflicts. When I discussed this with Clare Higgins,<sup>4</sup> herself a middle daughter, she described her own way into the play. She felt as the character Regan (Royal National Theatre production 1990) that she was angry, furious, at being displaced by Cordelia, her younger sister. She is no longer the baby and Goneril has been a surrogate mother after her own mother dies. As Regan, she believes her mother died giving birth to Cordelia, which is why she hates her, but at the same time wants to be like her. Higgins suggests that Regan's dilemma is in wanting to be protected by her elder sister, and therefore pleasing and copying her, and, at the same time, wanting to be the baby and get the longed-for affection from her father.

A similar dynamic revealed itself in several groups where people explored the relationship between siblings. I think there is a tendency to place greater emphasis in therapy on parental relationships to children, and less attention is given to the sibling relationship itself. It is surely an important next stage when there has been resolution in relation to parents, to allow for the development of the potential in sibling relationships.<sup>5</sup>

One dramatherapy group had already explored journeys into uncharted territory, a familiar enough dramatherapy structure (Jennings, 1990a): groups of three people make preparations for a journey; go on the journey itself, and then arrive at a new destination. In the process of this particular group, it was important for participants that they had managed to successfully struggle with the members of their small group in order to acknowledge individual skills and differences, and yet find a way of allowing a joint endeavour to be accomplished. They were able to acknowledge aspects of themselves and their reactions to others that could threaten the outcome of the journey. After de-roling and distancing from the several stories, the theme of siblings emerged as 'the hot theme'. People ventilated many feelings about being remote from their brothers and sisters, and the following points emerged from the discussion:

- 1 Anger at not having brothers and sisters.
- 2 Sadness at having no contact with siblings.
- 3 Distress at only meeting at weddings and funerals.
- 4 Frustration at not having any real relationship.
- 5 Unresolved pain at the lack of acknowledgement of a sibling who had died.
- 6 Jealousy and rivalry.
- 7 Not wanting to be the favourite.

These statements give some idea of the depth of feeling expressed by these clients:

My father expected so much of me that I could have killed him.

Husbands can come and go but your brothers and sisters are always there – if they speak to you that is.

Well your parents will go first anyway, but your brothers will be left for years.

The group requested time to continue an exploration of siblings, 'before it's too late', as one person said.

Rather than work directly with their own families, I used the *King Lear* material. There is a wealth of themes about siblings in many myths, stories and plays. The three sisters of the Lear household and the two brothers from the Gloucester home provide sufficient dramatic distancing, not only to look at family dynamics but also to express extreme and violent feelings within the limits of the play: the structure of the play allows for the freedom of the imagination.