Textraum

It was Sunday, one week after the final course of the European Advanced Bibliodrama training. My post-camp and -course blues were still itching but slightly fading away. I was attending the graduation ceremony of my daughter. She finished her Master of Law studies at the KU Leuven. An immense aula was filled with fresh graduates, their family and friends. In solemn gown and matching caps, their professors strode in on the tones of hymns sung by the university choir. It was a true dramatical setting.

The proclamation was carefully prepared. It was clearly not a run-of-the-mill act. As typical for lawyers, we were served with a commendable set of speeches. Of course, I don’t remember all that was discussed. However, there was one element that affected me markedly. Both, the dean and the keynote speaker, the vice president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, insisted on the responsibility of these mint young lawyers in working on a more just, connected and connecting society. They both referred to the policy of fear and nationalism that seems to grow stronger and stronger in so many countries, a policy that is becoming visible in the results of the elections, and in the attitudes of the leaders of more and more countries. No one was named, no political statement was made, but everybody understood. Justice should be more important than the law. When laws are made to serve the few, justice should prevail over the laws. Frans Timmermans was emotionally affected when he challenged the young alumni to work on the connection between people, between groups, between countries…

In that moment, all of a sudden, I saw myself again in Krzyzowa at the monument around the table in four pieces at the closing service of our course week and of the European Advanced Course as a whole. (picture) There we were gathered: eighteen people, eight countries, eight languages, protestant, catholic, orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran … After seven (beginners) or five course weeks spread over two years, our journey together had come to an end. The fellowship of bibliodrama has reached its first goal. However, I hope from the deepest of my hart that it is only the beginning of a lasting connection throughout Europe. During this journey, we focused on improving our knowhow of bibliodrama, but we learned, encountered (?) and experienced a lot more.

**Start of the course**

After the European Bibliodrama Conference of Torhout (Belgium), I kind of forced myself into the Advanced Bibliodrama Course. As an experienced bibliodrama leader and trainer in the Flemish (and Dutch) bibliodrama scenes, the few experiences I had in the European context were othe rworkshops at the conferences of Aland, Vilnius and Cluj, at the Deutsche Bibliodramatag and at the Kirchetag of Stuttgard and Berlin. The different approach I encountered there, made me curious to increase my knowledge and experience and to broaden my own horizon and skills.

This advanced course seemed to me the welcome opportunity to learn more in a structured way.

I feel privileged that Wolfgang accepted me and that I got the opportunity to become one of the ‘gang’.

**Concept**

The advanced course consisted of five course weeks. Every week was centered around a biblical text or theme and focused on a specific Bibliodrama working method or medium. In combination

with the specific atmosphere and historical background by virtue of the guest leaders and the location of the course, each course module was ensured to be rich and inspiring.

I joined the ‘gang’ at the first course week in Hamburg in November 2017. It was a large group, maybe too large, and we were thrown into the activities without further explanation. With one of the leaders being ill, the other one encountering problems of teaching and explaining in English and a completely new group, the start was sometimes confusing and a lot of benevolence of the participants was required.

However, we still moved, played, explored, walked and painted “between heaven and earth” within and on the frames. We started in Genesis 1 and jumped to “Our Father” into the Apocalypse. We practiced body work and got to know new people. For me it only awakened my “longing for more“.

The next stop was Kismaros, Budapest in March 2018. From this course week on, there would be a team of course participants leading a 2,5 hours bibliodrama workshop on the first day of each course to exchange experiences and share manners of advancement. The next days in Kismaros we took part in an interfaith psychodrama bibliodrama. Once more the story of creation was our playground. However, the fact that we were led by a mixed catholic and Jewish team made it very intense and novel.

In Jarvenpaa, Helsinki, in June, we stayed at a lake side. “Jesus walking on the water” was therefore an obvious text to explore with sounds and images and through empowering photography. As a group we grew closer. As bibliodrama leaders we got inspiring new impulses triggering us to experiment with this in our own working situations.

In Thessaloniki (April 2019) we could not get past Paul and we worked with Kor 13 through bodywork while making use of the historical environment. Although some of us were disappointed about the missed opportunities to work outside and with the surrounding history, it did inspire us to do more. It was increasingly visible that the group of course participants progressed not only in their bibliodrama skills but also as a group and in their European, interlingual and interreligious thinking and attitude.

In Krzyzowa we had an appointment with history once more. The importance of this place for Poland, Germany and Europe only occurred to me due to the stories of my fellow participants and their personal connection with European history. Once more I realized that the opportunity to participate in a European mixed course group and to be hosted in these divers European countries with their own background and history enabled us to weave connections across the borders of countries, religions and languages. Bibliodrama was in this adventure the connecting spider weaving the dreads and making a web strong and willing to carry each individual’s own search for meaning trough the old texts of the Bible and other books. In Krzyzowa we shared our own experiments and experiences of using bibliodrama in connecting people in our own working places. The goal was to design an intercultural, interfaith and multilingual bibliodrama. We all endeavored to accomplish that in the settings in which we are active. It was wonderful to see, hear and feel how we all grew during the two years as a person and as a bibliodrama leader.

In the world of today and especially after my experience in Poland, I realize the importance of such initiatives. It was a privilege to participate and it made me more devoted to Bibliodrama, to the European network and to the European people.

I learned about the richness of bibliodrama as a treasure room that shows new jewels en precious stones around every corner. Bibliodrama is never fixed and obvious. All the time it opens up new perspectives, media, ideas, working methods, effects …

**Learning outcomes**

I received the opportunity to learn as a person and in my faith. The longer period of learning, the different approaches of the leader teams, the variety of Bible texts were the scenery of my personal pilgrimage. As a leader and trainer, I don’t have many opportunities to be in the participants role. These courses allowed me to immerse myself in the texts and fully experience once more the power of Bibliodrama in all its aspects and diversity. Being a participant gave me the chance to deepen my personal process and my search in the meaning of the text as they are and in connection with my own life.

In addition, experiencing the Bibliodrama methods as a participant is a very rich learning experience. It gives new inspiration and it challenges me to tune my personal bibliodrama style. As a participant, it becomes clearer which instructions or methods are connected to your own way of working and which methods do not match with me but do work for other people.

I learned as a leader in conducting and experiencing, about feedback and supervision, about methods, interfaith and intercultural approach.

Therefore, being a participant was also enriching for my role as a leader and trainer. In the international multi diverse leader team in the different countries, I finally learned a lot about the diversity of Bibliodrama schools. Of course, I can read books and articles, but the real school is in the experiencing.

The more unexpected aspect was that I learned so much about Europe and history. The characteristic atmosphere and background of the different places we passed by awakened my hunger to learn more about them.

Finally, working in English and talking with people with a large variety of mother tongues made me very humble. Such a wisdom and vast knowledge to share. Above all, I am so grateful to be connected from now on with these beautiful and diverse people from all over Europe. Each country they come from now has at least one face connected with it. Your perception of a country becomes so different when “you know someone”.

**The future**

My wish for the future is to stay connected, to keep on being part of this Bibliodrama web and to keep on participating, developing and sharing bibliodrama and our friendship in Europe.

The first plans are made. In April, there will be a training course in Kaunas (Lithuania). The theme is “What about Mary”. We will work with texts and visions from different backgrounds. We will focus on working methods that can be used in groups with children and youngsters. For more information: <https://www.hetleerke.com/bibliodrama-english.html>.

**Final word**

At the end of the graduation of my daughter the university choir sang the Old Irish Blessing. So appropriate. This was also the song we were singing at our goodbye ceremony in Krzyzowa . One after the other took a symbolical forget-me-not flower from the joined bush and left. The voices became quieter and then there was the silence…

Let’s us dream and hope and act that the voices will rise again.

That the bodies will join again

That we will play and talk and share and get inspired in our daily live by the texts from the Bible and other religious traditions and literature. That the bonds we forged will resist the dividing streams.

**Next appointment for at least a few of us: Findhorn.**