The bibliodrama landscape in the Benelux

This attempt to draw the bibliodrama landscape of the Benelux turned out to be an interesting discovery of my own bibliodrama roots. My exploration involves bibliodrama in the Netherlands and Flanders. Despite our research we could not find any bibliodrama organizations our activities in the French speaking part of Belgium or in Luxemburg. There we have an open zone still to seduce.

Thanks to Jean Agten( Flanders) , Andries Govaart, Bas van den Berg, Cocky Fortuin-van der Spek ( Centrum voor Bibliodrama) and Jan and Marjorie Lap-Streur ( Netherlands) , I got a nice overview of the bibliodrama family tree in our two countries. The enthusiasm of all parties however made that their contributions were too large to get them all to fit in this small space. That means that you can just observe a sketch of the Dutch/Flemish bibliodrama family tree and an outline of the specificity of each branch or sprout. Those who want to know it all, I gladly invite on our website history page . <https://www.hetleerke.com/bibliodramageschiedenis.html>

**Drawing with family tree.**

**The Nederlands**

Out of the renewal movements in practical theology in the 80’s they culminated in three bibliodrama movements, one in Protestantism and two in the Catholic milieu.

In 2014 two of the three schools started working together in the Centre for Bibliodrama [www.centrumvoorbibliodrama.nl](http://www.centrumvoorbibliodrama.nl) . The mission was to train new supervisors so that the accumulated experience, knowledge and skills of bibliodrama are passed on to new generations. Participants learn to connect their life story and the written story in a creative and existential way.

The method developed by Nico Derksen and Frans Andriessen is called **the pastoral-existential method.** The method of Cilia Hogerzeil and Bas van den Berg is called **the physical play method.**

**In the pastoral-existential method** the biblical story is read and laid out in the playroom: here is the tree in which Zacheüs climbs, there is his house et cetera. In this way the different events and roles from the story also get their place spatially. In this playroom the participants walk around in silence and choose their role. The leader helps them with short interviews to appropriate the chosen role and to fill it with their own experiences. In the play the players hear and see each other's roles and react to each other in movement, gesture and language. In the after- discussion the players exchange what the event has done to them. This leads to new discoveries. We call this method existential because the leader searches for the existential-spiritual dimension in understanding the biblical text. This dimension is related to the life story. We call this method pastoral because the players help each other under the guidance of the leader to further explore and deepen this dimension in play and discussion as an exercise in faith communication.

All bibliodrama within **the physical-play method** is aimed at the discovery of meaning in the encounter between biblical story & life story. This is done through role exploration, role empathy, role meeting and improvisation. If you empathize and immerse yourself in the role of Ruth or Naomi, you experience at first-hand what these two women go through and what is at stake in Ruth's novella. Meaning is not invented but discovered while playing and reacting to each other. Anything can happen in the meeting of players.. Then they share with each other where they see a connection between the experiences in the play and their own life story. And what they have discovered in the biblical story.

The physical-play method is rooted in cultural traditions of drama and dramatic forms of play. Biblical stories are regarded as carriers of emotion- and value-charged insights and experiences. The basis of all play and drama within the physical-play method is the body. With all senses, mental and physical abilities and with active imagination, participants in a bibliodrama explore a biblical story with a view to discovering sense and meaning for their lives.

The third bibliodrama school in the Netherlands is the method developed by Jan and Marjorie Lap-Streur. The concept is the Dean-house method, derived from the teachers, Dean and Doreen Elefthery.

In this **psychodramatic form** of bibliodrama sacred books and action methods are interwoven by the participants. This approach is almost an action form of Midrasj explanation.

As a rule one person is central, the protagonist. Together with the other participants he explores a text. Not the text is the starting point of the bibliodrama, but the query of the protagonist. With the help of the other participants he can search for answers and possibilities. There is one criterion: the additions must not make the text superfluous. In this way additions can arise which the holy books do not mention. It concerns emotions, details of the situation, relations, dialogues and character traits of the characters. The story and the participants' own lives become interwoven in this way. One's own life can be understood again and in a different way. At the same time the chosen story often gets a new meaning.

In the training the participants develop the ability to independently and confidently lead the exploration of religious and secular philosophical texts. At the end of the course, each participant has knowledge of and experience with the most important concepts and techniques of basic psychodrama.

**In Flanders**

Here the bibliodrama story started from 1980 onwards. From different angles ( education and pastoral) and independently of each other, several people became active in the development of bibliodrama. The inspiration to broaden and deepen their methods was found in bibliodrama courses in the Netherlands or Germany. Therefor you will see the influence of all Dutch movements reflected. But the Flemish bibliodrama school soon developed as an own tree using the fertilizers from their Dutch neighbors

Under the impulse of Jean Agten as one of the founding fathers, throughout the years different training teams and attempts of having a more solid organization were tried out . The Flemish method got defined as a result of many courses and was consoled in a textbook/manual in 2007.

What are the characteristics?

First of all there is the choice for a consistent 'free and inductive' approach of the player in relation to the biblical text in an open way of philosophical communication. Inspired by the changing society, evolutions in theology, pastoral, educational pedagogy and religious didactics, the emphasis is placed on exploring, confronting and deepening the 'own' personal search for meaning of the participants in confrontation with the biblical story. The biblical story itself is indeed the starting point and point of confrontation throughout the play. It is not seen as a goal in itself.

A second aspect in which the bibliodrama in Flanders differs from the Dutch movements is the consistent group-oriented approach. When dramatizing the stories, the whole group of participants 'at the same time' is included. In addition to the confrontation with the various other roles from the story, each player also has the confrontation with the 'differently perceived' role interpretations by the other players in the group. The accompaniment style is very open but with great care and attention for all lines of communication with everyone also for the players on the edge of the 'story and scene'. To take care for this personal process a good sharing is an essential part of every session.

Jean Agten introduced the use songs of different traditions and ritual dances as a ritual part to canalize the profound experiences of the participants. This is a part of his way to express and consolidated with the whole group one's own experiences.

Characteristic of their approach is also the integration of guidance methods from the personalized bibliodrama method (Lap/Streur): such as the doubling, the change of roles and the open, following guidance style with great care for each participant's own options, rhythm and process. Multiple person-oriented forms of work were recorded and retranslated into a more interactive group communication. In addition, methods from 'sociodrama' were integrated and adapted in bibliodrama.

It is obvious that the Flemish school got its inspiration from various angles . From The Santekraam/ 7evende Hemel they got the play-creative approach, working with images and concrete materials. This working with objects and materials in a creative way as for the bibliodrama play as for the reflection part was further developed. It got a very important role in triggering the symbolic thinking and expression of the participants.

The open philosophical attitude by the use of stories from other philosophies of life and religious cultures worldwide in addition to the biblical stories is also a Flemish characteristic. Biblical texts in dialogue with poems and religious stories with the use of bibliodrama methods opens new opportunities for interreligious communication.

Since the start of Het Leerke ( Flemish for little ladder) this bibliodrama team searched to renew contacts with the Dutch bibliodrama organizations. A Dutch new team member educated in the Centre for bibliodrama joined Het Leerke. Since the EBN conference in Aland 2014 they are being inspired by what is happening in initiatives throughout Europe . For sure this influences their way of leading and designing workshops. It made the leading style more lively and divers. It is a treasure to enjoy and to be an active member in it.

The highlight in the Flemish work was for sure the European Bibliodrama Conference in Flanders in 2017 in which a multitude of bibliodrama forms were combined and explored by participants from 14 countries. Pieces of Peace and Jonah was the Theme. <https://www.hetleerke.com/piecesofpeaceinhoud.html>

In the bibliodrama landscape we move, we recognize the necessity of the connection with our European partners to train new people and to open up the minds especially in intercultural and interreligious bibliodrama. The European scene gives us the boost we need to lifelong discovering new ways. We are very grateful for this nice cross border bibliodrama family.

Websites

<https://www.hetleerke.com/europeanbibliodrama.html>

<https://www.centrumvoorbibliodrama.nl/>

<https://www.7evendehemel.nl/>

<https://www.lapstreur.nl/>