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*Scripture Windows: Towards a Practice of Bibliodrama*, by Peter Pitzele.  
Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1998.

All of a sudden everyone is doing bibliodrama! Rabbis, ministers, teachers, therapists; my Aunt Sadie did one for her 90th birthday. Some of those (not Aunt Sadie) have been students of Peter Pitzele or students of his students. Sometimes the results are powerful, sometimes banal or confusing. Now with Pitzele's new book, *Scripture Windows: Towards a Practice of Bibliodrama*, we have a control for authenticity that is exemplary and generative for anyone who wants to learn what bibliodrama is and how to lead one.

Bibliodrama is a psychodrama by-product that involves entering the spaces in the biblical narrative and expanding on them, maneuvering in the ambiguities of the text to create new understandings and personal meaning. The classic rabbinic interpretation of the Bible is *midrash*, the Jewish hermeneutic process that has become popular in modern literary theory (Holtz, 1984). Bibliodrama is a form of psychodramatic midrash.

In recent years, biblical stories have been dramatized in various ways to plumb their depths and release (or construct, if you will) their implicit meaning, enabling participants to make personal connections to the text (Krondorfer, 1992). Pitzele's qualifications as psychodramatist with a doctorate in English literature serves as his entrée to this intriguing enterprise.

Anyone who has participated in a bibliodrama directed by Pitzele knows that he is a master director and the foremost American practitioner of the art. He has evolved his own version, building from his experience with groups and his extraordinary personal spontaneity. Pitzele's first book (1996), *Our Fathers' Wells*, stressed themes that emerged in bibliodramatic explorations with various groups. In the report of those dramatic sessions, the weight is more on content than on method, on the intense issues that unite and tear apart the generations; the psychodramatically informed reader can recognize the implicit techniques.

Pitzele's new book explicitly presents the methods he has developed for conducting bibliodrama. First, varied techniques are introduced with many examples, followed by a long, fully articulated bibliodrama of the Joseph story from *Genesis*, which brings together all of the foregoing. Especially illu-

minating are the director's asides that take the reader inside Pitzele's deliberation in *medias res* on issues, most of which are likely to come up in other settings. If both the novice and experienced bibliodramatist study these honest quests carefully and internalize them, they will be spared much grief and avoid being painted into uncomfortable corners.

The book is concrete and rich in examples, instructive for anyone who wants to use bibliodrama in Bible study, education, liturgical experimentation, or psychodramatic therapy. Pitzele is very careful to draw the line between the psychotherapeutic and other uses. That is not to say that the therapeutic dimension is absent, just that it remains internal to participants unless there is full disclosure that sharing such material is a purpose of the group and that it is voluntary. Pitzele agonizes about protecting participants as they encounter personal issues while enacting the archetypal biblical situations and presents guidelines for their safety and the ethical conduct of the bibliodramatist. He also presents his own brief but honest critique of the bibliodrama technique itself.

A few questions might be raised. In my view, the author does not give sufficient account of his precursors. The great Sam Laeuchli, formerly of Temple University and now retired to Switzerland, who called his own version of bibliodrama "Mimesis," receives two footnotes that, while describing the method, mainly highlight the facets of it with which the author disagrees. Laeuchli's approach (1992), which he applied to the whole range of narrative, folk, and mythological literature, could well enrich the process developed by Pitzele. It would have been helpful if he had integrated that into the body of the book, as he admittedly is positive toward it in general.

For bibliodramatic practice, Pitzele changes the psychodramatic understanding of *doubling*. He is entitled to do this, of course, but it would be interesting to know his rationale, why he reads out of bibliodrama some of the powerful uses of doubling that could be adapted to it. On the other hand, Pitzele's technique of *echoing* is similar to some aspects of classic psychodramatic doubling and is indeed central to his version of bibliodrama. Why not more? My guess is that he wants to limit the therapeutic overtones of doubling.

Admirable as is Pitzele's desire to take back the Bible for ordinary people who love it from the monopoly of professional scholars and clergy, *midrash* of the classical Jewish sort came out of a cultural context, a background of shared values (Kudushin, 1976, 1972, 1963). Is anyone who comes at a text and interprets it in a personal way necessarily doing *midrash*? No matter how creative the insight, this is doubtful, unless you are ready to stretch the meaning of the word beyond recognition. Even allowing for the concept of modern *midrash*, there should be some criterion, broad as it might be, for what constitutes a credible and valid interpretation. Pitzele could well work on this issue, not to inhibit his liberating stance, but to deepen and refine his and our understanding of the bibliodramatic process.

The book is practical, in essence, a workbook, but (and the author says this himself) bibliodrama probably cannot be learned from the book alone. A group of congenial people is necessary, willing to share it and play with it, with opportunities to practice the techniques and give feedback to one another. That requires trust, a willingness to take risks and fall flat on one's face while learning. Some might not be ready for that, but, for those motivated sufficiently, the book is an excellent start.

If you have been in any group in which Pitzele has led a bibliodrama session, you will hear his voice in this book. Anyone who wants to lead or participate in bibliodrama in education, religion, or psychotherapeutic practice cannot, from this point on, do without Pitzele's book.

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