From Practice to Theory: The Hermeneutics of Bibliodrama in the Classroom

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Introduction

The study of hermeneutics has been a growing focus of Jewish educational research in recent years. Several scholars have addressed hermeneutic questions from a variety of different perspectives. Jonathan Cohen (1999) examines different hermeneutic options for teaching Bible through the prisms of Fromm, Freud, Strauss and Buber, and for teaching Jewish thought through the eyes of Strauss, Wolfson and Guttman (1990; 1998). Cohen's work on Buber is built on Stephen Kepnes's *The Text as Thou* (1992), an extended examination of Buberian and Gadamerian hermeneutics and its implications for education. Gadamer is, in fact, a common subject of discussion when it comes to hermeneutics and Jewish education: Michael Rosenak (1995) discusses how Hirsch and Gadamer's respective hermeneutic approaches might fit in with his notions of language and literature; Deborah Kerdeman (1998) analyses how Gadamer's ideas might illuminate the way we think about Jewish education; and, as we shall see, Gadamer's hermeneutic approach will also feature strongly in the discussion below (see also Gillis 1999; Holzer 2000; Sinclair In press).

Many of these works dialogue with Shaun Gallagher's important *Hermeneutics and Education* (1992), which discusses four main streams of hermeneutic thought, which he calls conservative, moderate, critical and radical, and the implications of each of these for a variety of educational issues. We will make use of Gallagher's distinctions in this essay.

What these scholars all have in common, though, is that they move between theory and practice in only one direction: from the former to the latter. This is, of course, an immensely important mode of Jewish educational research, and the recent publication of Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler and Daniel Marom's magnum opus *Visions of Jewish Education* (2003) shows how valuable such scholarship can be. However, in this paper I propose to move in the opposite direction: from practice to theory. Fox himself notes that this direction is a possible and fruitful one to take: "Our work with the educators persuaded us that the process of translation is equally effective when it moves from practice to theory. What takes place in a camp or classroom can reveal the implicit vision of education, provide its most persuasive critique, or even amplify its scope." (Fox, Scheffler, and Marom 2003, 256; see also Fox 1997). Marom's essay in the *Visions* book is an example of such a research move, in which he examines the implicit vision within a Jewish community day school. However, this is a rare case, and little other such research exists. My aim in this paper will be to perform this research move on a smaller scale, using the practitioner-researcher paradigm as a methodology. I will take a creative, innovative, and, dare I say it, fashionable method of Bible education, namely Bibliodrama, and examine the philosophical and hermeneutic principles that underlie it. This analysis will lead to some interesting and perhaps unexpected conclusions about the use of Bibliodrama in the classroom.

Methodology

My methodology follows that used by the relatively new school of practitioner-researcher scholarship. This mode of research is practised by scholars like Deborah Ball , Suzanne Wilson Magdalene Lampert, Daniel Chazan, and others (see, for example, Ball and Wilson 1996; Lampert and Ball 1998; Chazan 2000; Lampert 2001). This kind of research is made possible by creative partnerships between university-based schools of education and schools in their local vicinities. The researcher is a teacher in the school, interacting with actual students and real-life educational situations, and also a researcher in the university, analysing and reflecting on these experiences in the light of educational philosophy in general and the intricacies of the relevant discipline in particular. Little work of this type has been done in Jewish education, and I hope that this paper and others like it will begin a corpus of practitioner-researcher work in Jewish education.

Bibliodrama

What is Bibliodrama and why have I chosen it as a subject for investigation? The actual term Bibliodrama was initially promulgated by Peter Pitzele in his book *Scripture Windows* (1998). Pitzele is an educator who conducts Bibliodrama workshops across the United States and the world, and the book is a practical guide to the methods, techniques and hoped-for outcomes of Bibliodrama. Bibliodrama is an umbrella term for a variety of different dramatic improvisational techniques, including "voicing" the thoughts of Biblical characters at critical moments, "becoming" characters or even inanimate objects and seeing scenes through their eyes, etc. Related to Bibliodrama are a number of other similar methods, which all have as their basis some kind of dramatic-midrashic improvisation: "Storahtelling" is a new and popular form of Jewish education (www.storahtelling.org), and Kaunfer (2003) describes an approach he calls "interactive textual dialogue."

The Bible and Bibliodrama

Bibliodrama is only possible because of the terse nature of the Biblical text. It is a gap-filling exercise. The laconic style of the Biblical text has, of course, been known for centuries. Rabbinic Midrash is predicated upon gaps in the text (see Holtz 1984). In modern times, one of the most important early literary studies of Biblical narrative compared the Bible's terse, laconic, concise style, "fraught with background," to the detailed, descriptive foreground used in Homeric literature (Auerbach 1953).

Bibliodrama in the Classroom

Why has Bibliodrama become a popular pedagogic technique in the classroom? Aside from the excitement and interaction generated by the activity itself, the methodology also connects with some of the latest ideas and trends in educational research in general. It involves many aspects of constructivist education: allowing students to find meaning themselves, having the learning happen organically and informally, taking the teacher off centre stage, putting a focus on narrative, and making the teacher really listen to what the students are saying (Egan 1992; Smith 1998; Wiske 1998; Brooks and Brooks 1999). In a sense, Bibliodrama is the ultimate psychologization (Dewey 1902/1964) of the discipline of Bible interpretation.

Bibliodrama resonates, then, with constructivist educational ideas in general, and with Multiple Intelligences theory (Gardner 1993) in particular. Many recent practical teaching textbooks argue that the way we use visual, aural, kinetic and musical arts in the classroom should be deepened (Fogarty 1997, 46-54; Feden and Vogel 2003, 191-195; for a brain-based view of this issue, see Jensen 1998, 82-89), and Bibliodrama, with its emphasis on kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and other intelligences, seems like a technique which has not only a sound relationship to the discipline, but also manages to mesh with the latest concerns of educational research.

Finally, Bibliodrama has the potential to transform the way people think about texts and the tradition of textual interpretation (for a personal description of such a transformation by a professor of theology, see Gillman 2002).

This particular classroom

Let us now enter the classroom which will form the backdrop for the discussion in this paper. The classroom is in a suburban Jewish day school on the East Coast of North America. The students are 9th graders, all from middle class families which Cohen and Eisen (2000) would probably describe as "moderately affiliated." The students' relationship with Jewish texts is profoundly conflicted: on the one hand, they study Biblical and rabbinic texts every day of their school lives, and their Hebrew proficiency is, compared to the average American Jewish teenager of their age, relatively good. On the other hand, these students are products of American culture rather than Jewish culture; their role models are Brad Pitt and Eminem, not Abraham and Rambam. Jewish texts are artefacts that they are forced to study at school but which do not form part of the discourse and culture of their immediate families and life outside the school. In a recent paper I explore the implications of this cultural dissonance for various philosophical and policy issues in teaching texts in a Jewish day school; for our purposes here, it is enough to conclude that the rationale and desire for text study is by no means a given in these students' minds, and that their teachers are constantly searching for ideas that will light their students' sparks.

When students usually enter the classroom, they see a familiar scene: approximately twenty "chair-desks," arranged in a column and row format, all facing the same direction, towards a teacher's desk and behind it a three-blackboard wall. These "chair-desks" are the enemy of any teacher who wishes to teach creatively: they trap the learner in a cramped, seated position, they squeeze students into close proximity one to the other, and they direct the teacher to address the crowd rather than the individuals (on the relationship between physical classroom structure and teaching and learning, see Getzels 1974).

Today, I arrive in the classroom ten minutes early. Fortunately, it has been empty during the previous period. Ten minutes later, when the students arrive, they walk into a different and unfamiliar scene: I have moved all the desk-chairs to the sides of the room, facing against the walls, so that the classroom is transformed into a relatively large open space around which the students begin to congregate as they arrive. For me, their teacher, each student's reaction upon

walking into the room is already a vindication of my somewhat radical teaching choices for this period, as each enters and "does a double take," often with a "wow!" or "what's going on?"

We have been studying the Akeidah, Genesis 22, for a few lessons now, focusing on the text and its rabbinic and modern commentators. This is how I start off the lesson (my words are in regular font, the students' words are in bold type, and I have added some retrospective reflections on what was going on in my head in italics):

1. If you remember, I said that today we would be doing Bibliodrama… Bibliodrama involves getting into the head of the character. It involves momentarily <u>being</u> Abraham, momentarily <u>being</u> Isaac, momentarily <u>being</u> Sarah, or any one of the characters. If you're really good at acting, you could even try being one of the inanimate objects in the story. You have to use your imagination. If this is going to work, then we need to be focused, we need to be creative, and people have to take chances.
2. *I hand out some sheets with the text on.*
3. Okay, we're going to start reading, and I'm going to ask questions, and you're going to have to take some chances and become one of the characters.
4. *I then choose a student to begin reading the text. After the first couple of verses, I jump in, and direct my question at a group of students:*
5. Abraham, how do you feel right now? How do you feel?
6. *At first there is silence. I wait. Pitzele teaches that patience is immensely important during this opening segment. I prod a little. I say the words "Abraham, how do you feel?" to a few different students. "This is very difficult, I know," I say. Eventually, one student speaks.*

7. **God wants me to take my only son, the person who I love the most in the world, and He wants me to kill him.**
8. *This is a classic opening answer. In a way it's not an answer to my question at all, it is merely a rephrasing of the Biblical text. I feel grateful to the student who was brave enough to be the first to speak, but I know that I need to push more and thus move the group towards voicing what the text does not say. So I respond:*
9. And how do you feel about that?
10. **I feel betrayed.**
11. *Ah! There it is. Now I know that the lesson is going to be a success. I'm seeing creative midrash in action. I've just witnessed a student make a creative, interpretive move and explore Abraham's emotions; as Auerbach would put it, supply foreground to the text. I push the student:*
12. You feel betrayed, why do you feel betrayed?
13. **Because He's making me kill something that I love, even though…**
14. So why are you going to do it?
15. **Because I believe in God. [Pause]. Because He told me to.**
16. Are you sure?
17. **Well, I'm beginning to question it…**

18. *I ask another student:*

19. Abraham, how do you feel?

20. Confused.

21. Why confused?

22. Because God told me that my children would form a great nation, but now He's telling me to kill him so He's contradicting Himself.

23. So why do it?

24. Because He's God.

25. You argued with Him before, why not argue with Him again?

26. 'Cause He's giving me a reason for it.

27. Another student butts in without me asking:

28. I can't do it. It's just crazy. How could He make me take my son like this? How could He give me a son and then take him away like that? As numerous as the stars, He said. And now this?

29. I'm not sure if I acted correctly during this exchange. Were my questions too leading?

30. I read a bit more of the text.

31. Isaac, what's going on right now?

32. No response. I try a different tack:

33. God, what the hell are You doing?

34. I *am* testing Abraham but the test is not will he kill Isaac, the test is will he realise that what I'm saying is wrong and will he disagree with Me. I don't want blind faith, I want him to disagree with me.

35. So right now he's failing the test?

36. I presume that the student nodded here because I move on.

37. God, what are you doing right now?

38. I'm not testing Abraham, I'm testing Isaac. I want to see how Isaac will come out as Abraham's successor. Is he worthy of bearing the burden?

39. So what do you want Isaac to do?

40. I want Isaac to bear up and follow My will. When Isaac sees that his father is about to kill him and sacrifice him to God, that's Isaac's test, what is he going to do?

41. I move on to verses 7-8.

42. Isaac, what's going on? What are you thinking?

43. Now the answers come thick and fast.

44. I don't understand what he's doing, but I have faith that he won't do anything to me.

45. My dad told me that God would bring a sacrifice, so maybe he just wants to show me what God can do and can even bring a sacrifice out of nowhere.

46. I don't see what the big deal is. I think my dad is just getting old, and he just forgot to bring the sheep, you know, he's getting a bit senile. [Laughter.]

47. I've lost all trust and faith in my father. I don't care what God told him, any father that would kill his own son… [interruptions]

48. Why do you think he's going to kill you?

49. [Lots of interruptions]

50. I'm getting a little suspicious of my dad, he has been acting a bit weird lately, I mean he packed all his own bags, he's been crying all day, and I think it has something to do with God again. He's looking at me weirdly when he says God will show us the answer, I don't particularly trust him because God has made him done weird things in the past, and – I dare not think about it – but what if he wants to kill me now in honour of God?

51. So why are you going along with it?

52. Because I trust my father to an extent.

53. Really? Or do you want to trust him?

54. Yes, I want to trust him, he brought me up, he taught me good values…

55. After a few minutes more of this, I turn to a character whose voice has not been heard so far, either in the story or in our bibliodramatic presentation of it.

56. Sarah, you're at home right now. What do you feel? What do you know about this story?

57. I feel worried that he doesn't need me any more. Now I've had his son for him, he's just going to leave for good.

58. I'm really confused. I have no clue where my husband is or where my son is, and I'm really scared. *This student continues, "Can I do a post-bit?", which I take to mean can she voice Sarah at the end of the story, when she finds out what has happened. "Sure," I reply.*

59. When Abraham came back and told me what he did, I got really upset because he didn't tell me that he was going to sacrifice Isaac and didn't give me any choice in it and I thought that was really obnoxious and that's why in the end we separated.

60. Abraham always tells me what's going on, so he told me about this plan of God, and he told me he was really worried about it, but I told him not to worry and do what God said and it would be okay.

61. So you supported it? In hindsight, I missed a chance here, because it would have been a better response to have pushed the thought about Sarah being the "Lady Macbeth" in the plot.

62. Yes.

63. Abraham, why didn't you tell Sarah?

64. I didn't tell Sarah because she would definitely disagree with me because she wouldn't want the son that she bore to be sacrificed.

As the teacher, I was extremely pleased with this class. The students had been engaged; they had interacted in a sophisticated way with the text; they had been creative; they had shown knowledge of some of the commentaries we had studied. However, we know that sometimes a teacher's initial sense of superficial success may ignore deep philosophical issues that appear on

further reflection (see Sinclair In press). Thus the need for this paper. How can the educational moments described above be analysed and set in hermeneutic context?

The definitions of the word hermeneutics are many and varied;[1] for my purposes here, I wish to understand the term in its narrow sense of the art of interpreting a text, or, as Cohen puts it, "the status of a text for its reader" (Cohen 1999, 38). It is not my intention here to give an extensive survey of all the various hermeneutic options, but I would like to discuss briefly four basic hermeneutic positions which will serve as a sufficient basis for our discussion of the Biblical scholars to follow. The four positions are those that Gallagher terms "conservative", "moderate", "critical" and "radical." Gallagher is a scholar of hermeneutical thought who is particularly important in this context, for he relates these hermeneutical categories to their educational significance.

Conservative
The first position is exemplified by the American thinker E D Hirsch, Jr. Hirsch argues that "a text means what its author meant," and that this meaning, once the text has been set in writing, is unalterable for all time. An old text never loses its meaning, although its significance for different readers may change. But these two terms, significance and meaning, should never be confused, for they represent different and separate chronological stages in the history of a text:

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person… (Hirsch 1967, 8) (his italics).

Not only is authorial meaning intended and unchanging, it can be perceived by the reader. Even in cases where the text is very ancient and from a very different culture to the reader, the reader can still achieve a level of probability in understanding the text. "It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding." Genuine certainty in understanding, Hirsch admits, is impossible, for we cannot actually get into the mind of the author. But one's aim in reading is to reach a point where "correct understanding has *probably* been achieved" (Hirsch 1967, 17) (his italics). Readers have no place in this definition of hermeneutics: they must be impartial, must try as much as possible not to project themselves onto the text, and must read the text on its own historical terms; as Gallagher puts it, "the interpreter should be able (a) to break out of her own historical epoch in order to understand the author as the author intended, and/or (b) to transcend historical limitations altogether in order to reach universal, or at least objective, truth" (Gallagher 1992, 9).

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[1] Gallagher (1992) gives eight different and separate definitions: Schleiermacher's "the art of understanding", which was practiced in the reading of texts; Palmer's "the study of understanding, especially the task of understanding texts"; Ricoeur's "the theory of the rules that preside over exegesis"; Dilthey's "the art of understanding permanently fixed expressions of life"; Heidegger's existential, phenomenological analysis of human existence, which widened the concept of hermeneutics to an ontological plane; Gadamer's theory which illuminates the conditions of possibility of understanding; Bleicher's "theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning"; and Habermas's "art of understanding linguistically communicable meaning and to [sic] render it comprehensible in cases of distorted communication" (3-4). Gallagher himself opts for a philosophical definition of hermeneutics, which sees language as the medium through which the human being encounters the world, and thus, the world being "like a text which calls for interpretation", "hermeneutics examines human understanding in general" (7).

According to a Hirschian hermeneutic perspective, then, the act of reading is a process with a clear and evaluatable goal. The words in front of the reader were intended by the author as having a particular meaning. The reader's task is to get as close as possible to that particular meaning, and while absolute certainty may never theoretically exist, most of the time readers should have a sense of the degree of probability that they have understood the text correctly.

Moderate

This position is exemplified by, among others, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer contends that as readers, we are conditioned by our "prejudices" before we even begin to read a text. The term prejudice is used in a specific sense, not with its usual pejorative meaning:

> The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does the concept of prejudice acquire the negative connotation familiar today. Actually "prejudice" means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined. (Gadamer 1992, 270)

Thus all readers, when approaching a text, are full of prejudices; "we are always situated within traditions;" we are located on the same linguistic and historical continuum as the text we read, and therefore a purely objective reading is impossible: "the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it, must be discarded" (Gadamer 1992, 282). Thus one cannot separate the reader from the text, as conservative hermeneutics seeks to do. The reader and the text are in constant dialogue with each other, and interpretation involves what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons", between the reader's horizon and that of the text; in Gallagher's words, "a creative communication between reader and text" (1992, 9).[2]

Radical

Radical hermeneutics denies that any meaning is possible at all. It goes further than moderate hermeneutics, because, if the text is unstable, inaccessible, and constantly deconstructing itself, then there can be no dialogue between it and the reader. Reading, instead, is an act of playing with the words of the text and ultimately, there is no such thing as meaning; meaning is always indeterminate. Radical hermeneutics is associated with such thinkers as Derrida and Foucault. Actual deconstructionist readings of Biblical texts are quite rare, although Greenstein is an important proponent of their use and potential for Biblical studies (see, for example, Greenstein 1989).

Critical

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[2] There are certain similarities between the hermeneutic position of Gadamer and that of Stanley Fish. Fish, like Gadamer, stresses the reader's role in the creation of meaning: all readers understand texts through their own fore-understandings (in Gadamer's terms) or pre-readings (in Fish's): "communication occurs within situations and… to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions" (Fish 1980, 318). Fish, however, goes further than Gadamer; while both agree that meaning does not reside in the text, Fish argues that meaning is wholly *constructed* by the reader, whereas Gadamer talks of meaning being located "in-between" the reader's horizon and the text's. Interpretations of texts, according to Fish, are acceptable within "interpretive communities;" that is, within groups of readers who share the same set of assumptions and therefore construct the text's meaning similarly.

Critical hermeneutics, exemplified by writers such as Habermas, seeks to highlight the ideological nature of texts and thus free readers from the power structures which texts impose upon them. Gallagher notes that it is "a curious combination of radical and conservative elements" (Gallagher 1992, 11, 239-275). It is radical to the extent that this adjective describes its social and political aims; but it is conservative in the sense that it seeks to reach a definable, objective and achievable target whereby the sexist, racist, and classist nature of texts is revealed to readers, thus liberating them from the confines of the text. In critical hermeneutics, as with conservative, the reader reach a "true" understanding of the text; the difference is that conservative hermeneutics values the text over the reader (in other words, the reader's task is merely to understand the text accurately), whereas critical hermeneutics values the sensibilities of the reader as equal to, and often over, those of the text.

We might summarise these four schools of hermeneutic thought in the following way: conservative hermeneutics seeks understanding of the text; moderate hermeneutics seeks understanding with the text; critical hermeneutics seeks understanding despite the text; and radical hermeneutics denies the possibility of understanding the text at all.

Given this overview of the field, then, what kind of hermeneutics do we see in operation in my Bible class?

It is clear that a conservative hermeneutic stance is the last thing that is going on in this classroom. Actually, this is an infelicitous description, because the very first thing that happens seems to use conservative hermeneutics, before the Bibliodrama really sets off. In line 7, when the student merely paraphrases the text, we see a conservative hermeneutic in action: reading entails finding the original intended meaning of the text. However, this conservative hermeneutic does not last long. Once the Bibliodrama is in full swing, what kinds of hermeneutics do we see going on?

When one student reads Isaac as having faith that his father will do no wrong to him (line 44), another sees him as having "lost all trust and faith" in him (47), and a third (in a somewhat less thoughtful comment) thinks that Abraham was just getting senile (46), then we know that there is more here than merely trying to fathom out what the text is saying. There is an attempt to read in to the text, to flesh it out, to provide the kind of details that, in Auerbach's analysis, the Bible leaves out but Homer puts in. Sometimes Bibliodrama will result in voicings that are quite contrary to the spirit or even letter of the text, as in line 28:

> **I can't do it. It's just crazy. How could He make me take my son like this? How could He give me a son and then take him away like that? As numerous as the stars, He said. And now this?**

It's difficult to see this response as a legitimate "Hirschian" reading of the actual Biblical text. Abraham, however confused or betrayed he feels, does go ahead with the command, and we don't see the kind of refusal or questioning that happened earlier, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This student's response seems closer to what Gallagher describes as a critical hermeneutic. The student sees the text as stuck within a view of the Divine as absolute and

completely coercive, and wishes to emancipate the reader from this view; indeed, wishes to emancipate Abraham from the chains that the text has set upon him. This student re-reads the Biblical story to turn it into one that attacks and struggles with the Divine command.

There is also an element of the radical in Bibliodrama: the denial of any meaning in the text itself. The instability of the text comes out in the students' responses to my question about Sarah. Sarah is an insecure wife, who worries about her relationship with her partner, for whom questions of God are irrelevant and secondary to her personal pain (I feel worried that he doesn't need me any more. Now I've had his son for him, he's just going to leave for good); she is a supportive, even controlling, religious figure, the strong, believing wife who stands behind and pushes forward her timid, uncertain husband (Abraham always tells me what's going on, so he told me about this plan of God, and he told me he was really worried about it, but I told him not to worry and do what God said and it would be okay); and she's equally strong in the other direction, the wife who disagrees with her husband's religious extremism, who tries to push him in the other direction, but ultimately fails (I didn't tell Sarah because she would definitely disagree with me because she wouldn't want the son that she bore to be sacrificed). Acting in this way, students do not see any meaning in the Biblical text – the text is merely a bare stage with characters' names and a vague plot, and they, the students, will fill in the details; details which come, no doubt, from their own lives, concerns and experiences (the pushy wife and mother, the uncertain father, and so on). The text is indeed instable, and meaning is always indeterminate. This is troubling for traditional Bible teachers, as we will see below.

Are there moments when a moderate hermeneutic takes place? I would argue that in lines 12-26, at the beginning of the session, students were reading with this kind of hermeneutic. There is a recognition of the text's horizon: "He's making me kill something that I love"… "God told me that my children would form a great nation, but now He's telling me to kill him so He's contradicting Himself" – these comments are very close to the text itself, but then they are followed by remarks that seem like attempts to fuse the text's horizon with that of the students, like the exchange:
Because I believe in God. [Pause]. Because He told me to.
Are you sure?
Well, I'm beginning to question it…

And:

So why do it?
Because He's God.

The students' cultural world and religious frame of reference finds the idea of unquestioning submission to God's will alien and disturbing, but rather than read the text in such a way as to emancipate themselves from this foreign idea (critical hermeneutics), or simply accept the text's frame of reference upon themselves directly (conservative hermeneutics), they are here attempting to fuse their horizon with that of the text: moderate hermeneutics. Reading the Akeidah through a moderate hermeneutic stance requires the reader to set up the tension between the autonomous, personal, choice-based spirituality of the modern world (Berger 1980; Bellah et

al. 1985; Roof 1999; Cohen and Eisen 2000), and the model of submission and blind obedience presented by the text. Furthermore, this tension is not to be "solved," but must be left hanging, and religious meaning must somehow be found in the fusion, however uncomfortable, of the two horizons. When a student can stand in Abraham's shoes in a Bibliodramatic moment and say "Because He told me to," but then in the next breath say "Well, I'm beginning to question it," that student is allowing us a glimpse into an inner world which recognises the competing claims of two different cultural paradigms.

As an educator, I am most interested in creating moments where the moderate hermeneutic functions. I have no wish to emancipate students from the worldview of the text, but I also have no wish for them to accept it completely. The fusion of horizons, the dialogue between the worldview of the text and between that of the students, is where the richest educational encounters can take place. I should be happy, then, that Bibliodrama has enabled such an encounter to take place. But on closer examination, some major concerns emerge.

It appears that in the episode of Bibliodrama that we have here examined, there was a progression of hermeneutic approaches to the text. The students began by tentatively responding to the text in a conservative fashion, merely restating or trying to understand what the text was telling them. They then moved into a moderate hermeneutic stance as they sought to engage the text in dialogue, to set their worldview up against the text's and try to find meaning in the fusion of these two horizons. However, this moderate moment does not last long. It gives way relatively quickly to a critical hermeneutic perspective. One might almost say that once the students have been given a taste of "freedom" from the text's horizon, they run too far with it: their own worldview rapidly becomes centre stage, and they see their roles as readers to repaint the story through the prism of this worldview. The idea of dialogue between the text's horizon and their own is lost; the reader's horizon is no longer formed through a confrontation with the text's; the source of authority now lies entirely with the reader.

And this critical hermeneutic perspective then gives way to a radical one. If one student's meaning is as good as that of the next, if a variety of modern worldviews can be painted onto the skeleton of the Biblical story, then there is no meaning at all: the text becomes entirely unstable, and anything goes. Sarah can be angry, happy, submissive, pushy, present, absent… it is as if there is no original text at all.

For a teacher who regards the moderate hermeneutic stance as the most fruitful for education, this progression is clearly of concern. I should note that I am not making any sweeping claims about the technique of Bibliodrama in general. It could well be that the way this particular lesson was taught pushed the students into the progression I have described, and that Bibliodrama taught in a more skilled way might avoid these pitfalls. My analysis in this paper is limited to this particular instance of Bibliodrama, and my aim is more related to process than result: in other words, I wish to show how this kind of practice-to-theory analysis can help teachers immensely in thinking about what they are doing in the classroom, and can provide a challenging critique to what may appear at first sight to be a successful educational experience. Nevertheless, it would be an interesting research project to analyse more instances of

Bibliodrama with different teachers and in different contexts, and try to establish how regularly this pattern occurs.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, though, what tentative conclusions might we draw from this study? Regarding Bibliodrama as a specific method, at least in the way I have used it until now, this analysis is somewhat sobering.   On the surface, it seemed to be a remarkably successful technique both in terms of student reaction and in terms of educational theory: it addressed multiple intelligences, used artistic and creative skills, and so on, as we have remarked above. It was a pedagogical method that seemed to bridge between authenticity and relevance (Rosenak 1995). However, after analysing it in this way, I am much more cautious about this claim. Our hermeneutic analysis has indicated that it is a technique that is much more weighted towards relevance than authenticity, and my future use of it will need to be more careful, with a more serious debriefing session afterwards and even, perhaps, with an attempt to bring students into a conversation about the kind of issues that have been raised in this paper.

On a more positive note, I hope that the movement in this paper between practice and theory has shown just how valuable and exciting such intellectual activity can be. There is room for more such research in the field of Jewish and religious education, and this kind of work could also play a significant role in pre- and in-service teacher education.

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