**Lovestory of the Millennium**

**Bibliodrama on Old Icelandic Texts**

*What kind of texts can be used for bibliodrama? Within EBN practice, Biblical texts are most common, but other religious or literary texts can also be used. During the European BASICs project (2012- 2014) experiments were successfully made using different texts from Christian, Muslim and Jewish contexts in interreligious settings. Björg Árnadóttir, one of the Icelandic participants, was fascinated by the bibliodramatic method and was inspired to find an opportunity to use Old Icelandic texts for bibliodrama. She contacted the Bibliodrama Society in Sweden and the project Nordic Bibliodrama was launched in April 2015.*

**How it started**Björg Árnadóttir from Reykjavik Academy, Iceland, is a writer and a cultural entrepreneur with versatile experience of research, education and creative activities. “Since I always like to try out new things, I got the idea to explore our fantastic Nordic heritage through the methods of bibliodrama”, she says. She contacted Birgitta Walldén from Sweden whom she had met during the BASICs conference in Crakow in May 2013 (conferences are good for net-working). Björg´s idea happened to coincide with the Swedish interest to strengthen international contacts around bibliodrama and a wish to develop bibliodramatic methods for other religious or literary texts than the Bible.

**Bibliodrama Tour in Sweden**
Björg Árnadóttir visited Sweden for a week in the middle of April 2015 during which she conducted bibliodrama workshops on Icelandic texts in three places. First time performance of Nordic Bibliodrama took place in Falun, where she met a small established bibliodrama group usually led by Helene Isborn, chair-person of the Bibliodrama Society in Sweden, and her colleague Susanne Dahlgren. This time the group was enlarged with several other people who were curious to meet the Icelandic texts. The next stop was the Nordic folk high school Biskops Arnö, where both students and staff participated. The last workshop was a full day at Bromma folk high school. Here the participants were members of the board of the Bibliodrama Society and other trained bibliodrama leaders. Birgitta Walldén had the privilege to accompany Björg during the whole bibliodrama tour.

**Old Icelandic Literature**Old Icelandic Literature is a cultural and literary heritage that Icelanders get to know from an early age and that is still very much alive both in Iceland and the other Nordic countries like Sweden. The literature consists mainly of *Poetry*, for example the Poetic Edda, *Sagas*, some describing the life and adventures of families of settlers, and *Lawbooks*. The texts where written down 1100 – 1400 and build on oral traditions that go even further back in history. The literature is highly praised for its specific literary character with vigorous language, metric power and human wisdom, which appeals also to modern women and men.

**The Prophesy of the Seeress and other texts**
The texts chosen by Björg Árnadóttir represented important parts of the Old Icelandic literary treasure. The Prophesy of the Seeress (the Völva) belongs to the Poetic Edda (approx. 900) and can be described as a narrative about the creation and the destruction of the world. The groups worked with two beautiful verses (19 -20) describing the world tree Yggdrasil and the three “maidens deep in knowledge”, Urd, Verdandi and Skuld. The three maidens, who represent the past, the present and the future, measure out and weave the fate of the children of mankind.

From the world of the sagas a few excerpts were made from Laxdaela Saga (900 – 1250) which describes the fates of a family during seven or eight generations. This saga highlights more than other sagas a feminine perspective och tells stories about strong, bold and energetic women. It is even believed that the saga was written by a woman. A bit into the saga, the protagonist is Gudrun Osvifrsdóttir, renowned for her beauty and intelligence. She is loved by both Kjartan and his foster-brother and cousin Bolli. Between them the Lovestory of the Millennium takes place, a story filled with strong feelings, violent actions and tragedy. Kjartan is killed by Bolli in a rage of rivalry and Bolli himself is killed by Kjartan´s men.

The participants met Gudrun in four strong dreams about her future husbands and in a conversation between Gudrun and her son Bolli about which of these men that she had loved the most. “I behaved worst to the one I loved most”, Gudrun answered, an expression that has become a familiar quotation on Iceland. Besides, two other dramatic texts from Laxdaela Saga were explored through drama.

**Impressions from participants**The participants in all the three workshops experienced that the bibliodrama method worked very well to make the Old Icelandic texts come alive in a modern context. They really appreciated to work with these texts with their strong expressions of love, hate, faithfulness, betrayal and violence. Compared to the Biblical texts, some felt that the Icelandic texts describe love relationships in a more dramatic and emotional way, being easier to identify with. It was obvious that the participants were deeply touched both by the texts and the bibliodramatic exercises, especially the encounter with Gudrun´s dreams. In the discussions, vibrating existential experiences about love and fate were exchanged.

“It was a challenge for the group to characterize the persons from the saga – so filled with strong feelings of joy, anger, love, hatred, betrayal, life and death. The participants this evening jumped into the task. Afterwards they could state that it works very well to make bibliodrama on texts from the Nordic literary treasure.”
*Helene Isborn and Susanne Dahlgren, Church of Sweden, Falun*

“We had a very nice moment of sharing. This was a good way to come close to a text.”
*Carin Emenius, journalist and student at Biskops Arnö folk high school*

“A very exciting day. Fine points can be made from connecting Bibliodrama with different text sources, Christian or Icelandic and many more, of course. Perhaps human beings need exactly this weaving out of the past in the present to form the future.”

*Lotta Geisler, Bromma folk high school*

**Impressions from the leader**Björg Árnadóttir reflects around her experience of the project: “I was happy and grateful to get the opportunity to work with our common cultural heritage together with the extremely competent Swedish bibliodrama leaders. Being an Icelander, I have this literature in my backbone, even if I am not an expert. However, I knew that there was a treasure of material to draw from. My approach was to leave out (almost all) violence and concentrate on emotions, especially love, drama, dreams, beliefs about fate and supernatural beings and powers. I also wished to weave together the Sagas with the Edda to be able to introduce as much as possible of the literature in the short time that I would spend with the groups. I believe that my choice was the right one. I myself experienced the texts in a much deeper way through this work. I also believe that if the participants has expected emotions, this is what they got.

However, I feel I made some mistakes during this world premiere of Nordic Bibliodrama. My biggest mistake was not to trust my own knowledge about the material. I prepared myself for extremely difficult questions, when it turned out that only information at a basic level was needed. Next time I know that I can fully trust my own knowledge.

An extra bonus for me was to realize that bibliodrama is an excellent way to teach literature. By arousing an emotional interest in the literature you can make people curious enough to start reading. I am now more than ready to continue this discovery journey into medieval Nordic life and literature. I believe that we benefit from getting to know our roots and being able to mirror ourselves in feelings that were felt in the past, which still can be experienced as fresh and new in our time.”

**Future follow-up**The Bibliodrama Society in Sweden highly appreciated the visit and the workshops led by Björg Árnadóttir. Friendships were made that might lead to renewed contacts in the future. Bibliodrama always develops as a result of personal encounters.
*Birgitta Walldén, Certified Psychodramatist and Certified Bibliodrama leader, Uppsala, Sweden*