



Teaching Fairy Stories with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lesson 8: Rhetorical Wonder

Outline:

The Student

- At the grammar and logic levels, we need to preserve the wonder still in the hearts of the students.
- Students need to be set free to wonder.
- At the level of rhetoric, the task has shifted.
 - At this level, the task becomes the re-enchantment of the student's mind and heart.
 - They need to be reminded of wonder and given permission to continue to do so.
- The trajectory of the student ending up in certain places requires that certain tools be in their kit.
 - Modernity and postmodernity can be seen as cultural neurosis (complex of insecurities and overreactions).
 - Milton makes a point about Satan that is true of us as well. We carry Hell inside of us.
 - Postmodernism is not an attempt to escape loneliness (modernist), but to celebrate it and turn it into a strength.
 - We don't want to let go of the solitude, because we think it guarantees sovereignty.
 - We have fidelity to "my own personal truth" rather than Transcendent truth.
 - If my truth is only good for me, it is no truth at all.

What fairy stories offer to us:

- Physicalism is the belief that physical things are the only types of things that there are. Fairy stories come at us with fairies, which are natural not supernatural creatures who disturb our sense of the boundaries of the physical. Fairies are a source of mischief.
- "What use is it?" is the theme of the pragmatist song. You can't just talk about what is necessary. A life that is only useful is a life that is reduced. Taking the time to delight in whimsy will cure one of pragmatism more quickly than good philosophy.
- Against naturalism, the fantastic offers gods and spirits and the dread of the soul. Fairy stories don't claim or deny reality, they just show it to you.
- Against disbelief, the fantastic offers stories of faith. It is hard to live in such stories and abide in disbelief at the same time. Fairyland gives you an



- expanded cloud of witnesses. Seeing that another human like us has done it is encouraging. That is a source of faith going forward.
- Against suspicion, the fantastic offers wonder. Suspicion is closed-heartedness. Suspicion shrinks the heart. We are often led to wonder despite ourselves.
 - Against closed-mindedness, it offers possibility. Closed-mindedness requires certainty to survive. One of society's problems today is that everyone is so certain about everything. Our imaginations are actually pretty small. Certainty is an illness that is produced in part by a constrained imagination.
 - The fantastical offers a remedy to precisely the things that our students at the rhetoric level are bombarded with.
 - Please feed your students fairy stories.
 - They are useful because it is not immediately clear what use they can be put to.
 - They are urgent because they are unconcerned with time.
 - They are deep because they aren't afraid of being trivial.
 - They are glorious because they don't mind being lonely.
 - They can give life because they aren't afraid to die.