



Narration: A Classical Guide with Jason Barney

Lecture 10: Narration in the Liberal Arts Tradition, Part 1

Outline:

Is narration truly classical?

- What proper methods would best serve our ultimate goals and the nature of the curriculum that we're recovering from the classical tradition?
- Does narration help or hinder each part of the liberal arts tradition paradigm.

Piety & Gymnastic

- **Piety** is defined as the proper love and fear of God and man (Clark & Jain).
- The modern world is fundamentally impious.
- Narration is a fundamentally pious act.
 - We are taking rich content that we want to preserve and pass on to the next generation.
 - We should value the practice of narration for how it gets students to attend to valuable texts, and develop the habit of responding with submission and reverence to the text as it is. We first seek to understand before we criticize the text.
 - We can use the Bible to train the proper fear and love of God himself.
 - Narrating is deeply relational.
- **Gymnastic**: narration develops bodily habits that would support their higher learning.
 - Clark and Jain comment that we are unions of body and soul.
 - The physical conditions required for learning are obvious. Reading is a work of both the mind and the body.
 - Narration involves the student in a more embodied way in his reading. He is telling it himself. He is embodying the text into who he is.
 - The student is actively engaged in telling. The student is reenacting the text as they received it.
 - They don't simply passively listen, but active engagement in the story.

Musical Education

- **Musical education** is education inspired by the muses.
- We are trying to reach our children's hearts.
- Mason endorsed recitation and life-giving studies.
- There is a value of reading aloud to students from beautiful works of literature, even without narration.



- Narration cultivates a students' affections more thoroughly than other methods of engaging with those sorts of tests. If we start them in narration, we are doing something much more deeply classical.
- Students can narrate before they can read for themselves. When the child is 6, not earlier, let him narrate the fairy tale.
- Children can take much more by ear in this musical education, if we trusted their ears and have them tell.

The Liberal Arts

- **The Trivium Arts**
 - **Grammar**, from a historical perspective is the training in reading and interpretation.
 - When we understand these subskills of language, we can then read better.
 - Narration ties student's natural oral abilities with what they are seeing on the written page.
 - Narration is a force multiplier for everything we already do in grammatical training.
 - **Rhetoric**: Narration is an incredibly important preliminary activity (progymnasmata).
 - They (these students who read great things) will welcome the preparation for public speaking, and effort for which everyone must qualify.
 - Fluency in speaking is developed through the act of telling.
 - Classical educators had been training students in the science of rhetoric, rather than the art of rhetoric (Locke).
 - Narration gives fluency in telling and speaking naturally and at length.
 - **Dialectic**: Narration will help support student's development in dialectic if we are putting idea rich texts in front of students.
 - By regularly giving them a feast of rich ideas in the great books, that prompts reflections.
 - Questions naturally arise in the minds of students who are used to narrating rich texts.
 - The activity of thinking becomes externalized due to feeding on rich ideas.