



## Narration: A Classical Guide with Jason Barney

### Lecture 4: The History of Narration in the Classical Tradition

#### Outline:

The history of narration in the classical tradition

- Narration was drawing from a classical source.
- Narration deserves a place at the table in classical education's great conversation.

The earliest mentions of narration come from the grammatical and rhetorical tradition of the classical world.

- In primarily oral or spoken cultures, narration was the method of passing along either wisdom sayings or great stories from the past.
- In terms of the classical era, narration is mentioned in the **progymnasmata**.
  - The teacher reads the text aloud to the students.
  - Students were required to listen and then write out from memory.
  - After this, they use further practices of paraphrasing, amplifying, or refuting.
  - This would be used to train students in the art of memory.
- **Quintilian**, famous rhetorical teacher, talks about narration.
  - Let boys learn to relate orally the fables of Aesop in plain language.
  - Let them learn to express the poets in different words.
  - Let them express them in paraphrase, provided that the sense of the poet be preserved.
  - If they can do this, they will be able to learn anything.
  - Quintilian's goal is that they will narrate in plain language and express the same simplicity afterwards in writing.
  - He wants students to have this general fluency, and then they can progress to doing written narration.
  - For him, narration is not a side exercise. It is connected to the core of learning itself. Narration is a central tool of learning.

#### Reformation and Renaissance, Erasmus and Comenius

- **Erasmus** envisions the teacher giving lecture content to students. He urges teachers to give students the task of reproducing it in their own words.
  - Time and trouble is involved in this. This would give the teacher a formative assessment.
  - The focus is on substance as opposed to just the style. The focus is on the content as students are engaging with it.



- **Comenius** was a great reformer. He mentions narration as well.
  - Every pupil should require the habit of acting as a teacher.
  - The pupil himself is immediately required to give a satisfactory demonstration and exposition of the same thing in the same manner.
  - Docendo discimus, by teaching we learn. When you have shared it with another, that's when you really know it.

### **Early Modern Era, John Locke, British enlightenment philosopher**

- For John Locke, he felt there had been a failure of the classical education of his day. He criticizes how logic and rhetoric were taught as if they were about memorizing up a lot of rules.
  - Instead of training a student in memorizing rules, we have them read and narrate from Aesop's fables.
  - Once a student has developed and gets better at their way of telling, correct the next important fault until they have developed a fluency of telling.
  - The primary goal of rhetorical training is to be able to speak fluently and at length about any topic.

### **Charlotte Mason adapted narration to a global method.**

- We had the opportunity to put books into the hands of every child.
- Charlotte Mason, in the Victorian era, set forth a book based education.
- Narration would become the primary tool of assimilation by which students would learn and be accountable for their reading of these wonderful books.
- All students are going to school for the first time too. A liberal arts education was, formerly, an education of the noble class.
- She found narration to be the global school that could be used throughout the school day.