

6. Storytelling

The following has been created by Marina Katsari (www.marinakatsaris.com), a pre-school teacher/storyteller / theatre practitioner, with extensive expertise in storytelling.

Storytelling is one of the basic human functions. It is an automatic, intuitive mechanism, which involves both intellectual– as it contributes to the world’s understanding and interpretation– and physical capacities –as our first memories of storytelling are stimulated by our senses. We remember that our hand got burned when we touched the stove burner, so we wouldn’t dare repeat such a move. The burn on our hand, as well as the memory carried along with it, is actually a story, a narration we offer to our self, which helps our body and mind survive.

Storytelling can be found everywhere, throughout man’s life, and it is governed by eternal rules. The beginning, the middle and the end, as well as the points in between, the story’s coherence and its resolution, as described in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, constitute the lighthouses of storytelling. You may ignore them and still avoid crashing but you will definitely fail to communicate effectively your thoughts and actions to others. The narration of even the simplest daily habits, such as floor sweeping, is based on a predetermined, often boringly repeated, mental process. We do not need to narrate yesterday’s sweeping to a listener in order to render this story into narration. Besides, this story is not interesting to anyone. Nevertheless, the steps we follow in order to sweep form a narration on their own: first I will hold the broomstick steadily and with control, then move it towards the corner behind the sofa, where dust has accumulated, before moving around the VT. At the end, feeling angry and tired, I will throw the broom back to its place in the storeroom. Narration is, after all, connected to action.

People are blessed and cursed to find our way and create our stories, while walking. Homo sapiens is a thinking man because he is also homo narrans – man who narrates – telling his own story, as well as the story of the world where he lives and struggles (Kouloumpi-Papapetropoulou, 1997). Man narrates not only what he understands but also what he does not understand, and acts accordingly. Long stories, such as mythologies, ideologies and religions, apart from explaining the world, or at least trying to, define people’s actions and contribute into forming societies which strive to put an end to destruction and violence among people. According to the Cypriot legend “Of Saint George”, a dragon was blocking water from running to Cypriot villages, where people, animals and plants were dying of thirst. In order to let the water run, he demands a carnivore meal of several young men and women every year. When the turn of the King’s daughter comes to be sacrificed, Saint George intervenes. The princess explains: “Dear master, where do I begin to tell you about people’s sufferings? Starving people eat each other”. No matter how unjust societies were, people were always seeking for justice in the Art of Narration.

Storytelling, as a human function, and the Art of Narration, as a more skilled presentation of thoughts and as a human artifact, are different. Storytelling may become an Art (of Narration) in the same way that breathing may be developed from an automatic human function to a means exploited in Art, e.g. music. Man can spend all his life breathing, and he may survive by remembering (and narrating) that fire can burn him. However, man is different from animals in the sense that apart from surviving, he can live; he can move and act beyond his biological existence on the planet towards a higher form of life. Man has the privilege of education, which adds meaning to his actions and behaviour. In the same way, the Art of Narration gives meaning to storytelling, which has been given to man in the same way that the function of breathing was, transforming it into a higher function than a survival mechanism.

Since storytelling is based on a relation (even when we talk to our wonderful selves when we are angry), the Art of Narration is the most significant tool for the development of relations among people and for learning/education (Lamprelli, 2010).

In the course of history, some have praised the educational value of fairytales, the fictional, imaginary narrations, while others have deconstructed it (Anagnostopoulos, 1997). Plato rejected imagination and its creations, arguing that they drive man away from truth. On the other hand, his student Aristotle established the educational value of the Art of Narration. This classic controversy between teacher and student has inspired thousands of creators and philosophers throughout history, becoming a narration itself.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: 2015-1-IT02-KA201015407



Nevertheless, in such significant questions, the truth lies somewhere in between. Hence, the educational value of the Art of Narration might be based on the quality of the story and its compatibility to the age of the pupils-audience.

Young children discover the world just like the first cave man discovered that apart of cries and screams, one can have a calmer and more rational approach. For children, animals, plants, objects, imaginary creatures might be more familiar than some cartoon heroes. On the other hand, adventure, mythology, legends, riddles and climaxing stories may be more appealing to older children.

Through the Art of Narration, a child may learn how to control its thoughts and actions, just like it learns how to control its breathing while climbing up a steep hill. At a time when people forget, or ignore, patience, persistence and hard work, it is essential for a child, a potential narrator, to realise that before the satisfaction of a need, i.e. before the end of a story, come the beginning and the end; while in between comes coherence -the building of the story- which might evolve to a resolution. Further, no one can deny the worth for the young storyteller to appreciate the value of failure.

References:

Β.Δ. Αναγνωστόπουλος, Τέχνη και Τεχνική του Παραμυθιού, Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 1997, σελ 198-199

Λιλή Λαμπρέλλη, Λόγος εύθραυστος κι αθάνατος, Εκδόσεις Πατάκη 2010, σελ 104

Κούλα Κουλουμπή-Παπαπετροπούλου, Η Τέχνη της Αφήγησης, εκδόσεις Πατάκη, 1997, σελ 11.