

NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY ON A TRAIN

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There are multiple narrative layers to *Eccentricities of a Blond-haired Girl* (*Excentricidades de uma Rapariga Loura*, 2009). On one level there is the narrative of the film itself. Here, director Manoel de Oliveira uses elegant settings and images, sparse but highly stylized dialogue, and a series of temporal shifts to tell the story of a young man's struggle with lost love. As storyteller, Oliveira establishes Macário (Ricardo Trêpa) as a distraught protagonist and sets up a flashback pattern early on in the film. Yet there is another narrative layer to the film. It is Macário's. Within the wider landscape of Oliveira's work is the narrower frame of Macário's personal story. As *Eccentricities of a Blond-haired Girl* unfolds, Macário shares his story with Senhora (Leonor Silveira), the dignified lady seated next to him on the train.¹ By sharing his story Macário acts as a narrative pedagogue, and the train car — within which the two travel — acts as a sort of teaching and learning space. As the seatmates interact, and their conversation unfolds, the lady also becomes a pedagogue. With these aspects of the film in mind, three questions arise: What exactly makes Macário and Senhora narrative pedagogues? How do the travelers benefit from their pedagogical exchange? What are the implications of this exchange for the film itself? In this paper I aim to address all three of these questions.

To analyze Macário and Senhora's practice of narrative pedagogy, and consider the wider implications for the film itself, I have divided this paper into three segments: (1) "Narrative Pedagogy on a Train," (2) "Narrative Benefits on a Train," and (3) "Implications for *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl*." In the initial segment I briefly summarize how narrative pedagogy has been practiced and defined in recent years. In this segment I also outline how Macário and his seatmate act as narrative pedagogues throughout the film. In the second segment I draw from core aspects of narrative pedagogy, as well as narrative paradigm theory, to identify what it is the two travelers gain from their dialogue. In the closing segment I discuss what Macário and Senhora's practice of narrative pedagogy means for the film itself, as well as those who watch it.

NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY ON A TRAIN

In this segment I ask: What exactly makes Macário and Senhora narrative pedagogues? To discuss this question it is necessary to determine what narrative pedagogy is. Over the past few decades, narrative pedagogy has been discussed, and indeed practiced, by a wide range of educators and theorists, including Kieran Egan, Walter Fisher, and Ivor Goodman.² While there are differences in the way these thinkers have conceptualized and practiced narrative pedagogy there is also much that they share. A review of key writers in the narrative pedagogy arena reveals three overarching themes in how it is commonly conceptualized. These themes include: (1) *Restorying* experiences to form personal narratives and then sharing them with others, (2) *Conversing* with others about the narratives we share, and (3) *Making meaning* of our lives by examining the narratives we share. In addition to outlining these three core aspects of narrative pedagogy it is important to consider how they link to Macário and Senhora's exchanges throughout the film. After all, the way the two travelers experience *restorying*, *dialoguing*, and *meaning making* forms a key part of Oliveira's wider narrative, and ultimately contributes to the film itself.

Restorying

When conversing with others we often share stories from our past experiences. Although this process might seem straightforward, it isn't. Using narratives to communicate with others involves a number of interlocking steps. Initially, we access our declarative memory, which acts as a sort of reservoir; to peruse things we have done as well as things we have seen or heard about.³ We then select an event, or series of events, to form a narrative. Macário begins this process very early in the film. Shortly after engaging Senhora in conversation the young accountant casts his mind back and begins to recall his recent experiences in Lisbon, which centered on his entanglement with Luísa (Catarina Wallenstein). In order to do this, he draws from his declarative memory. In a general sense, we might say that a narrative is a "temporal sequence, a plot, characters, a context, and [...] the sense of an ending."⁴ But it is important to note that drawing from our past experiences is not purely a matter of recall. In selecting and then presenting a narrative we actually reconstruct, or *restory* that experience.⁵

According to researchers F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, “A person is, at once, engaging in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories.”⁶ Within this process, our memories, and perspective of the past, is never static. As curriculum theorist Carola Conle noted, “each telling” of a story is fluid because it “somehow adds and changes the story [one] remembers.”⁷ Macário’s personal narrative is fluid on three levels. On one level, he accesses episodes from his past using his declarative memory, episodes which he remembers differently each time he recalls them.⁸ On another level, he is telling the story to someone who asks him to expand on, and/or explain, certain points along the way. By conversing with Senhora, Macário’s narrative is reshaped as it is told. On a third level, Macário is telling a story that he might retell, albeit in a slightly different way, in the future. Because the study of narrative is “the study of the ways humans experience the world,” narrative education could be viewed as: “the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; [where] teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories.”⁹ In other words, the reconstruction we carry out in accessing memories and telling our stories is a social process that has direct implications for learning.

As *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl* unfolds, Macário demonstrates restorying process in a number of different ways. In telling his story to Senhora, he strategically selects moments from his declarative memory and reconstructs them to form a larger overarching narrative. The narrative that Macário constructs; which focuses on his courtship of Luísa, is made up of a series of smaller vignettes. Along the way, the troubled accountant includes certain episodes and excludes others. Key events that Macário relates in his story include the first time he came face-to-face with Luísa, the time he first met her, and the last time they saw one another. It is important to note that selecting which experiences to include in a personal narrative is only one way of restorying our experiences. People also restory past experiences by blending separate events to form composite narratives, and even sometimes graft fictional elements onto their personal narratives.¹⁰ Of course, it is possible that Macário draws from a variety of these restorying techniques throughout the film. While restorying is certainly an important dimension of story sharing and learning, as we see with Macário, it is just a starting point. Narrative pedagogy is also about conversing.

Conversing

When we revisit our experiences and form them into narratives we often share, and some-

times also discuss, those narratives with others. As researcher Howard Sklar noted, “narratives are implicitly *social*.”¹¹ With this view of storytelling in mind, we might say that conversing forms the second core aspect of narrative pedagogy. Focusing on an actual school context, Conle observed that, “The milieu most conducive for narrative interactions is a classroom climate that promotes personal, experiential reactions.”¹² In a general sense, the practice of narrative pedagogy presents people — both storytellers and listeners¹³ — with an opportunity to “share publicly and interpret their experiences.”¹⁴ The conversational manner in which Macário and Senhora explore the young man’s Lisbon narrative exhibits this dialogic process. For Macário, it is important to not only have someone who will listen to his story, but someone who will also converse with him about the story.

On one level, conversing is an important part of narrative pedagogy because it is transformative. Curriculum theorists Ivor Goodson and Scherto Gill reasoned that: “dialogic interaction and reciprocal encounters and exchanges” help lead to “shifts in individuals’ narrative characters.”¹⁵ To present people with opportunities to benefit from narrative exchanges, learning contexts rooted in narrative pedagogy gather individuals “into converging conversations wherein new possibilities for practice and education can be envisioned.”¹⁶ In *converging conversations*, people are encouraged “to describe personal meanings and significances about their experiences.”¹⁷ As Macário and Senhora journey to Algarve, and delve further into the young man’s entanglement with Luísa, the travelers engage in exactly this sort of a conversation. Ideally, according to Andrews et al., these exchanges inspire people to challenge their day-to-day assumptions about the world.¹⁸ When Senhora voices her response to different elements of Macário’s ongoing narrative, she prompts the distraught young man to revisit and, on occasion, even rethink events he has just described. Some overarching questions that might arise in conversations rooted in narrative reflection, include: “What does this subject mean to my life? How does it help me make sense of my life or give it direction?”¹⁹

But engaging in dialogue is not a given. For people to participate in conversations rooted in narrative reflection, they must not only have opportunities to speak, but they must also be empowered to speak. Additionally, those participating in a dialogue should feel that the space within which they are speaking is safe and open to multiple viewpoints. As Connelly and Clandinin noted, “In beginning the process of narrative inquiry, it is particularly important that all participants have voice within the relationship.”²⁰ In Conle’s view, the conversational nature of narrative pedagogy lends itself to collaborative learning where in-

dividuals, “are co-inquirers and co-learners, each with their own crucial expertise contributing to the process.”²¹

With the conversational nature of narrative pedagogy in mind, it is important to remember that *Eccentricities of a Blond-haired Girl* is essentially an extended dialogue between two travelers. More precisely, Macário and Senhora are at once on a physical journey through Portugal as well as a psychological journey into Macário’s past. Their psychological journey is guided by their conversation, with a series of flashbacks (some long and some short) interspersed throughout. While their actual dialogue comprises approximately eight minutes of screen time, which amounts to about one-eighth of the film, the exchanges between the Macário and Senhora are significant. While she is often a listener, Senhora expresses interest in Macário’s story on numerous occasions through her words and her body language. Her excitement encourages Macário to continue with his narrative, which considering its content is not an easy one to share. But Senhora’s contributions go beyond encouragement. From time to time she asks Macário to clarify, or elaborate on points he has made. And her questions persuade Macário to add details, as well as explanations, to support his observations. On occasion, Senhora even draws her own conclusions about Macário as well as his narrative. At one point, for instance, she tells the distraught traveler he is being bitter. Later in their conversation she informs him he has “the face of an honest lad.” Through actively dialoguing with Macário, Senhora contributes to the way his narrative is shared, which represents another narrative layer of the film.

Making Meaning

As we reflect on the narratives we share, as well as the ones we hear, we participate in conversations. Such conversations help us to reflect on, respond to, and ultimately understand the narrative at hand. More specifically, they also help us to consider not only what occurred in the narrative but also what it tells us about our lives. Both Macário and Senhora engage in this contemplative process throughout *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl*.

In a general sense, we construct meaning as we contemplate our experiences.²² With this relationship between storytelling and meaning making in mind, we might say that narrative pedagogy is not about knowledge transfer, but rather about interpretation and construction. Connelly and Clandinin viewed this interaction as narrative inquiry, “a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying.”²³ As Andrews et al. observed, narrative

pedagogy “engenders a relationship with skill acquisition and content that is situated in meanings and significances rather than knowledge alone.”²⁴ Further, as interactive thinking forms a part of our conversations, pedagogy rooted in the narrative mode: “focuses on processes such as teaching; interpreting; critically thinking; and analyzing concepts, ideas, and situations.”²⁵ But the atmosphere within which a conversation unfolds is also important. Imagine for instance, Macário defensively snapped at Senhora every time she asked for a clarification or expressed her thoughts on his narrative. Such behavior would perhaps have hindered the interactive nature of their journey. Perhaps it would have even ended their dialogue altogether. According to Scheckel and Ironside, the spaces where people take part in narrative exchanges need to encourage, and not detract from, discourse.²⁶

While trekking to Algarve, the two travelers make meaning of Macário’s narrative in a number of different ways. Macário seeks to understand how events in his past relate to one another. He selects certain occurrences from his memory to share with Senhora and discards others. The occurrences he selects present a larger sequence of events that, when taken together, form the narrative of his courtship with Luísa. By choosing to relate the events that he does, Macário identifies a perceived causal relationship between them. But Macário’s perspective of his own narrative goes beyond causality. He is also interested in the uniqueness of his experiences. Before beginning his narrative, for instance, he tells Senhora, “You can’t imagine what happened to me.” Later on, he states, “What happened next, you cannot even imagine.” In these two statements the young accountant is telling Senhora that his experiences are extraordinary. He believes that Luísa deceived him in love, and a friend deceived him in business. While being deceived isn’t necessarily extraordinary, Macário believes that the circumstances surrounding his dramatic experiences of deception were singular enough to make them extraordinary. In the following segment, which considers what exactly Macário and Senhora gained from their exchange, I will delve further into the matter of making meaning in *Eccentricities of a Blond-haired Girl*.

NARRATIVE BENEFITS ON A TRAIN

The interconnecting acts of developing, sharing, and analyzing our narratives are all important parts of our lives. As we better understand our past experiences we are better able to

face challenges in the present and prepare for the unknown future. Formulating and interacting with our personal narratives also helps us to construct and perceive our identity. On this point, Goodson and Gill argued that: “a person’s sense of self is imbedded in the narrative construction.”²⁷

While Macário and Senhora’s dialogue is clearly rooted in narrative pedagogy, it is important delve further into their prolonged exchange. In order to do this we might ask: How do the travelers benefit from their pedagogical exchange? To address this question, I have divided their benefits into two general categories: benefits for Macário and benefits for Senhora. I have further divided these benefits into five subcategories. For Macário, the storyteller, benefits include having an opportunity to: *restory* a personally significant experience and share that experience with an attentive listener, *dialogue* on the experience with his audience, and *make meaning* of the experience. For Senhora, the listener, benefits include having an opportunity to *hear* a good story, and *converse* with, and offer *help* to, the storyteller.

Benefits of Restorying and Sharing – Macário

One benefit for Macário is having a venue, and opportunity, to share his narrative. In telling his story, he relives his first few months in Lisbon as well as his trip to Cape Verde. During those months he worked as an accountant, often saw Luísa at the window across from his office, and quickly became captivated by her beauty and grace. He found a way to encounter Luísa in a social setting and soon thereafter courted her, with the approval of her mother. When he lost his job and was unable to find a new position, Macário quickly spiraled into near destitution. Although Luísa still wanted to marry him, he asked her to wait until he could regain a stable position; and for a period he reluctantly refrained from seeing her. After a business trip to Cape Verde, as well as a few set backs, the youthful accountant eventually regained his job, reestablished his savings, and became engaged to Luísa. While selecting a ring with his fiancée, however, Macário became aware of something that very quickly led him to end their engagement. And this is where his narrative ends.

Although Macário’s story contains many unpleasant memories and ultimately concludes unhappily, it is one he could not suppress. It haunts him. According to Conle, we share our stories with others because “there is a certain content that wants to be told.”²⁸ For Macário, the need to share his experience is powerful, and he even prefaces his narrative by telling Senhora: “I really need to get it off my chest.” The act of sharing his personal narra-

tive thus enables Macário to confront feelings of sorrow, anger, and confusion that are entangled with his memories. Perhaps the very act of telling his story is cathartic.

Benefits of Dialoguing – Macário

While articulating his story might be cathartic, Macário benefits from his storytelling experience in other ways. Very early in the film, the storytelling dynamic transforms into a dialogue between the narrator and listener. In this dialogue there is a clear element of reciprocity between the two travelers. Senhora not only informs Macário that she is willing to listen to his narrative, but on more than one occasion she excitedly tells him how curious she is and urges him to continue with his story. Rather than being a passive listener, Senhora asks questions and offers comments. Early on, for instance, she speculates, “And you fell in love with her?” Macário’s reply encapsulates his feelings about the entire affair, “That was my great misfortune.” Later, when describing Luísa’s curtains, Macário’s disdain noticeably surfaces as his tone of voice and words reveal scorn. After listening, and patiently waiting for Macário to finish his description, Senhora observes, “I see you are very bitter.” Macário’s anger subsides, and after pausing for a moment he quietly replies, “I am.” Perhaps having a thoughtful, eager audience is precisely what Macário needs as he revisits the emotional experience of falling in and out of love with Luísa. Dialoguing with Senhora provides the distraught traveler with an opportunity to not only articulate, but also discuss his recent troubles.

Benefits of Making Meaning – Macário

When telling his story to Senhora, Macário has an opportunity to gaze back in time and make sense of his past. “During this act of telling,” according to Conle, storytellers “are likely to remember or discover incidents and details not held in mind at the outset of the telling. This remembering may in fact even change their story or prompt a new understanding of it.”²⁹ In order to access his memories and restory them into a narrative, Macário takes a looking-back perspective and selects key events in his relationship with Luísa. Selecting these particular events in turn leads him to make connections, as the events offer insights into Luísa’s sense of honesty as well as his own sense of trust.

In the early part of his narrative, Macário describes the first time he came face to face with Luísa. It occurred when the young lady and her mother were visiting the shop located

below Macário's office. Shortly after the visit Macário learned that some "150 Euros worth of handkerchiefs" went missing from the shop on that very day. Later, when detailing the evening he first met Luísa, Macário recalls a poker game in which he participated. During the game, a poker chip slipped and rolled along the table, toward Luísa. When she moved to catch the chip it suddenly disappeared. Luísa claimed that she was unable to locate the chip, and it was never found. At the conclusion of his story Macário relates what occurred on the day the couple went to purchase an engagement ring. While selecting a ring, as well as a pair of earrings, a diamond ring went missing from the display tray. Although Macário was unaware of what had occurred, Luísa's sleight of hand did not go unnoticed. Soon thereafter, when the couple prepared to exit the store, the shopkeeper confronted Macário. Shocked and embarrassed, the young accountant quickly paid 500 Euros for the ring Luísa was clutching. In retrospect, a theme of theft and deception runs through Macário's encounters with Luísa.

According to Conle, oral or written discourse aims to convey not only an event but also a larger series of events.³⁰ Macário's narrative presents a pattern of events, where it seems that Luísa deceived him on three separate occasions. While the poker chip and missing handkerchief incidents might not have stood out to Macário when they occurred, his perspective of looking back leads him to draw connections and recognize a possible pattern of deception. Conle called this process *narrative playback*.³¹ Highlighting the reflective aspect of narrative playback, Ironside noted that narrative pedagogy helps people "think through and interpret the experiences they encounter."³²

Having a venue to restory his past and discuss it with a thoughtful listener prompts Macário to consider not only how events fit together, but also how they resonate with his life. The young man's process of making connections between events in his personal narrative might help him to approach situations of trust and relationships in the future. According to Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community, as lived."³³ For Macário, this learning involves his view of honesty, trust, love, and in particular, situations where the three intersect. Through his process of making meaning of his narrative, Macário develops certain knowledge of himself. Self-knowledge, in the words of van Manen, is ultimately "related to the search for one's own life story."³⁴

Benefits of Hearing a Good Story – Senhora

While journeying to Algarve, Senhora gets to hear a *good story*. And she benefits from this experience in two ways. On one level she converses with Macário, the storyteller; and on another level she offers him her help. However, before analyzing these benefits for Senhora it is necessary to do two things. First, I will establish what it means for a story to be *good*, and second I will consider whether or not we might say Macário's Lisbon narrative is a *good story*.

To establish what it means for a story to be good I will draw from narrative paradigm theory. First coined by Walter Fisher, narrative paradigm theory entered into our lexicon in the early 1980s. When outlining the theory, Fisher proposed that human communication is firmly rooted in a narrative mode, whereby "all normal human discourse is meaningful and is subject to the tests of narrative rationality."³⁵ He further contended that, "meaning is a matter of history, culture, and character as well as linguistic convention and interanimation."³⁶ Two foundational components of the paradigm, according to Fisher, are narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability stems from an individual's schema regarding storytelling and story structure.³⁷ It is one's awareness of "what constitutes a coherent story."³⁸ Narrative fidelity is "whether the stories [people] experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives."³⁹ Elaborating on this premise, Fisher stated that narrative fidelity: "concerns the "truth qualities" of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values."⁴⁰ Good stories, however, push beyond narrative probability and fidelity. When researching the affect of fictional characters on young audiences, Sklar noted that the core activities of narrativity are "observing and judging."⁴¹ Similarly, Fisher noted that: "*good stories function in two ways: to justify (or mystify) decisions or actions already made or performed and to determine future decisions or actions.*"⁴² In short, good stories also link to judgment.

According to narrative paradigm theory, good stories demonstrate narrative probability and fidelity, and help us to both judge things and understand ourselves. With this framework in mind, we might ask: How does the narrative Macário shares with Senhora exhibit these qualities, if at all? In order to assess the young accountant's story through the lens of narrative probability, we need to pose a further question, namely: How does Macário's Lisbon narrative constitute what we would call a coherent story? To answer this question, we

might draw from Conle's fivefold definition of narrative, which includes a "temporal sequence, a plot, characters, a context, and [...] the sense of an ending."⁴³ In terms of temporal sequence, Macário's story follows his first few months in Lisbon along with his trip to Cape Verde in forward moving chronological order. The plot's foreground concerns itself with his courtship with Luísa. It's middle ground and background depict Macário's relationship with his uncle, his struggles with money and work, and his business interactions with the man in the straw hat. The context of Macário's story is Portugal in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. Regarding the sense of an ending, the breakup between Macário and Luísa presents a denouement to Macário's story. In sum, Macário's Lisbon narrative exhibits narrative probability in a variety of ways.

While Macário's narrative demonstrates narrative probability there is also the dimension of narrative fidelity to consider. Drawing from Fisher to consider the matter of fidelity, we might ask: How does Macário's narrative accord with "the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values?"⁴⁴ Macário's story conveys narrative fidelity in three key ways. First, it is the story of a young man trying to start his life in a new city. The challenges he faces with securing adequate employment and paying his bills are common challenges and his attempts to overcome these challenges quite plausible. To find a new job he contacts former business associates and when his funds run precariously low he seeks help from his uncle. Second, when Macário has a second opportunity to work in Cape Verde he deeply struggles with this decision, as travelling would once again separate him from his beloved Luísa. For Macário, the very thought of separation is upsetting. Balancing family and work commitments is not always easy, and it is reasonable for Macário to struggle with this decision. Third, the distraught accountant's narrative depicts what it is like to fall in love and then be deeply disappointed by that person. Shocked to discover that Luísa had attempted to steal a ring from a jewelry shop, Macário responded by breaking off his engagement. While the manner in which Macário ended the relationship with Luísa was certainly abrupt, it was not unsurprising given his intense feelings of disillusionment. Although there are other examples of narrative fidelity in Macário's Lisbon narrative, these three examples indicate key ways in which the young accountant's story demonstrates narrative fidelity.

Benefits of Conversing and Helping – Senhora

In listening to Macário's Lisbon narrative Senhora becomes, in a sense, the young account-

ant's audience. While she retrospectively *observes* Macário's unfortunate recent experiences, she transforms into more than a *sympathetic witness* as the film unfolds.⁴⁵ By the end of the film, Senhora has become a participant in the larger narrative of Macário's life. Having an opportunity to converse with, and offer help to, Macário leads to a variety of benefits for Senhora. On one level, she benefits from dialoguing with the storyteller. While listening to the young man share his story, Senhora occasionally poses questions to ask for clarification. She also, on occasion, put forward her own views and interpretations of the events in Macário's narrative, as well as their implication. Because I provided examples of Senhora's queries and observations earlier in this paper I will not delve into their details here.

By pausing his narrative to respond to Senhora's queries and listen to her comments, Macário demonstrates a readiness to engage in a dialogue with his fellow traveler. Senhora not only has an opportunity to listen to Macário's narrative – a good story – but she also has an opportunity to discuss its content and meaning. Because she is welcomed to express herself as a listener, the space within which Senhora engages in dialogue is one of respect and empowerment. And her exchange with Macário is one of participatory inquiry. Reflecting on the atmosphere within which narrative pedagogical exchanges unfold, van Manen noted: "spaces can be created where pedagogical relations in classrooms and schools have a chance to emerge, to be nurtured and strengthened."⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, the train care within which the seatmates speed forward is one where Senhora feels safe to articulate her views.

The dialogue between Senhora and Macário presents Senhora with a venue, and space where she feels safe in expressing her views, but it also, on another level, presents her with an opportunity to offer help. According to Brown et al., "Telling personal experiences promotes empathy and understanding."⁴⁷ While the act of telling his story might be cathartic for Macário, the content of his narrative remains painful. As an active and thoughtful listener, Senhora is able to offer affirmation and solace to the storyteller on numerous occasions throughout the film. Near the end of the narrative, for instance, as Macário relives the distress he felt when deciding whether or not he would return to Cape Verde for a second business trip, Senhora calmly nods in agreement. Without using words she silently indicates that she is listening to Macário, she understands his pain, and she empathizes with his dilemma. As a consequence, Senhora offers both affirmation and a "sympathetic response," to her fellow traveler.⁴⁸

On one level, conversing with Macário leads Senhora to listen to his narrative and make meaning of what she heard. But she also has a chance to support the distressed storyteller. Not only does she have a voice but she also engages in a critical thought process and bonds with the storyteller. As Brown et al. observed, “Cognitively, narratives help improve learning and problem solving; affectively, they help instill hope; interpersonally, they serve as a socialization tool, helping to establish trust and promote bonding; finally they help foster personal growth.”⁴⁹

IMPLICATIONS FOR *ECCENTRICITIES OF A BLONDE-HAIRED GIRL*

In sharing his Lisbon narrative with Senhora, Macário acts as a storyteller throughout *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl*. As the two travelers converse about the young man’s trying experiences, they make meaning of his narrative and Macário’s act of storytelling transforms into an exchange. While both Macário and Senhora benefit from their exchange it is important to consider what it means for the film itself. To examine the relationship between Macário’s storytelling, the seatmates’ experience of narrative pedagogy, and the storytelling of the film itself, I address the following question in this segment: What are the implications of Macário and Senhora’s exchange for the film?

Narrative Layering

Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl is a film with multiple narrative layers. In a wider sense, the film is a cinematic narrative, with director Oliveira performing role of storyteller. In a narrower sense, the film portrays a distraught young man who is telling his own story while journeying on a train. Rather than opening the film in the past, Oliveira launches Macário’s Lisbon narrative *after* establishing the young accountant as narrating protagonist. Moreover, before Macário begins to tell his story, Oliveira’s audience already knows its end result. We know that the young man’s entanglement with Luísa will ultimately prompt him to leave Lisbon in a distraught state, as we see in the film’s opening. By sketching Macário’s character and situation before jumping into his narrative, Oliveira gives the young man’s story a clear voice. Narrative framing helps Oliveira provide a rich context for the events depicted in the film’s extended flashbacks.

Macário is a naïve storyteller who has been shaken by his experiences in Lisbon. Senhora is a thoughtful listener. Because Macário is presented as a quiet, likeable man who is clearly troubled by his recent experiences, Oliveira's audience is invited to feel for his difficult situation. Because Senhora sympathizes with the young accountant, the film's audience is not only privy to Macário's storytelling but the very telling of the story is a human exchange. In a sense, Oliveira's use of narrative layering personalizes the events portrayed in the film's extended flashbacks. As Sklar noted, "narratives provide absorptive experiences" as the audience becomes "immersed in the events and details of a story and the sensations that they produce."⁵⁰ For *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl*, narrative layering deepens the audience's emotional, and absorptive, experience.

Inter/Active Proxy Listener

Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl depicts the story of Macário telling his narrative to a smartly dressed lady on a train. The narrative Macário shares opens enigmatically. Before beginning, the troubled young man tells the lady: "You cannot imagine what happened to me." His narrative is elusive in other ways as well. Macário knows little of Luísa, and consequently her actions — such as trying to steal a ring — are left unexplained. The enigmatic nature of Macário's experiences quickly draws Senhora into his narrative, and just as Senhora is drawn into Macário's narrative we, as Oliveira's audience, are drawn into the film. Senhora, however, is more than a proxy for the film's audience. At times, she asks for clarifications, articulates her observations, and occasionally affirms her new acquaintance. Because she both engages in and responds to Macário's narrative, Senhora becomes inter/active listener as the film progresses.

Senhora both listens and responds to Macário's story. When she poses questions to Macário, she does so on behalf of the audience. The clarifications Macário provides for Senhora not only benefit her but they also benefit those who are watching the film. When Senhora affirms Macário, whether it is through her words or her body language, she sympathizes with the distraught narrator on behalf of the film's audience. Through Senhora, Oliveira's audience is, in a sense, able to indirectly interact with Macário. As an inter/active proxy listener Senhora is also a critical interpreter of what she hears from Macário. Whenever she challenges Macário, as she does when she tells him he is bitter, her comments serve multiple purposes. Some who watch the film might have been thinking the same things and

in such cases, Senhora's comments would serve to articulate their thoughts. Her challenges also act as a sort of warning. Senhora is warning the film's audience that the narrative Macário is about to share will be told through a subjective lens — one that is tinted by his bitterness.

CONCLUSION

Narrative pedagogy begins with our experiences. Utilizing our declarative memory we populate and structure narratives, which we then share with others. As we revisit past experiences, as Macário does throughout the film, we reconfigure them. In part, this is because we recall things differently each time we tap into our declarative memory.⁵¹ While speeding to Algarve, Macário selects episodes from his relationship with Luísa and then recounts them to Senhora. As the travelers' exchange indicates, the process of sharing personal narratives can be highly interactive. On such occasions, we engage in dialogues about our narratives, and collaboratively explore such questions as: What happened? Why did these things happen? What do these things mean for my understanding of the world? Of course, Macário's narrative raises additional questions about love, honesty, and trust, including: What does it mean to be honest? How can I know when to trust someone? How can I love someone I cannot trust? While these questions are complicated, they are universal. In van Manen's view, "It is the significance of good narratives that they tend to reveal universal aspects of human beings."⁵²

Although Macário restories his past when sharing his Lisbon narrative with Senhora, the story itself is not an example of narrative pedagogy. The travelers only become pedagogues through their exchange. By interactively examining and making meaning of Macário's recent experiences, the seatmates demonstrate key processes and benefits of narrative pedagogy. On a wider scale, by depicting a storytelling process, Oliveira layers the narrative of the film, which contextualizes Macário's story and gives it a strong personal voice. By presenting Senhora as an inter/active proxy listener, the director draws his audience — who are also listening to Macário's story — into the film, where it is possible to vicariously interact with the young man who is sharing his personal narrative. *Eccentricities of a Blond-haired Girl* is a film about love and trust. It is also a story about a young man who is telling

his own difficult narrative. The film offers its audience a layered, educative experience that captures how we use narratives to understand our past and connect with others.

1. Macário refers to his seatmate as *Senhora* throughout the film. In English, the word means *Lady*. From hereon I will refer to the lady as *Senhora*.

2. Key theorists who focus on narrative pedagogy include Kieran Egan, Nancy Diekelmann, and Carola Conle. Additionally, while F. Michael Connolly and Donald E. Polkinghorne practice narrative inquiry, much of their work overlaps with narrative pedagogy. Narrative inquirers draw from the voices and stories of participants in a research context. Like narrative pedagogy, inquiry involves the processes of listening to personal stories and dialoguing with storytellers to make meaning of one's experiences. See Kieran Egan, *Teaching as Storytelling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and the Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1988) and Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Also see Ivor S. Goodson and Scherto R. Gill, *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011) and Walter Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1-22.

3. For an overview of our understanding of memory, see Larry R. Squire, "Memory Systems of the Brain: A Brief History and Current Perspective," *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* 82 (2004): 171-177. To learn about declarative memory, see Neil Burgess, Eleanor A. Maguire, and John O'Keefe. "The Human Hippocampus and Spatial and Episodic Memory," *Neuron* 35 (2002): 625-641. To read about links between declarative memory and storytelling, see Peter Hazel, "Toward a Narrative Pedagogy for Interactive Learning Environments," *Interactive Learning Environments* 16.3 (2008): 199-213.

4. Carola Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," *Educational Researcher* 32:3 (2003): 5.

5. F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19.5 (1990): 2-14.

6. *Ibid.*, 4.

7. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 10. To read about research on memory instability see Peter S.B. Finnin and Karim Nader, "The Role of Metaplasticity Mechanisms in Regulating Memory Destabilization and Reconsolidation," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 36 (2012): 1667-1707.

8. For further discussion on the subject of memory instability, see Karim Nader and Oliver Hardt, "A Single Standard for Memory: The Case for Reconsolidation," *Nature Reviews* 10 (2009): 224-234.

9. Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," 2.

10. For a discussion on story truth and happening truth, see Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula."

11. Howard Sklar, "Narrative as Experience: The Pedagogical Implications of Sympathizing with Fictional Characters," *Partial Answers* 6.2 (2008): 491.

12. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 5.

13. From hereon I will use the word *listener* in place of *listener-reader-viewer*.

14. Catherine A. Andrews, Pamela M. Ironside, Catherine Nosek, Sharon L. Sims, Melinda M. Swenson, Christine Yeomans, Patricia K. Young, and Nancy Diekelmann, "Enacting Narrative Pedagogy: The Lived Experiences of Students and Teachers," *Nursing and Health Care Perspectives* 22.5 (2001): 253.

15. Goodson and Gill, *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning*, 114.

16. Pamela M. Ironside. "Using Narrative Pedagogy: Learning and Practising Interpretive Thinking," *Issues and Innovations in Nursing Education* 55.4 (2005): 479.

17. Andrews, Ironside, Nosek, Sims, Swenson, Yeomans, Young, and Diekelmann, "Enacting Narrative Pedagogy: The Lived Experiences of Students and Teachers," 255.

18. *Ibid.*, 253-254.

19. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 13.

20. Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," 4.

21. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 4.

22. See Ironside, "Using Narrative Pedagogy: Learning and Practising Interpretive Thinking."

23. Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," 4.

24. Andrews, Ironside, Nosek, Sims, Swenson, Yeomans, Young, and Diekelmann, "Enacting Narrative Pedagogy: The Lived Experiences of Students and Teachers," 258.

25. Sylvia T. Brown, Mary K. Kirkpatrick, Dana Mangum, and Jeanette Avery. "A Review of Narrative Pedagogy Strategies to Transform Traditional Nursing Education," *Educational Innovations* 47.6 (2008): 283.
26. Martha M. Scheckel and Pamela M. Ironside. "Cultivating Interpretive Thinking Through Enacting Narrative Pedagogy," *Nursing Outlook* 54 (2006).
27. Goodson and Gill, *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning*, 114.
28. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 6.
29. *Ibid.*, 7.
30. *Ibid.*, 5.
31. *Ibid.*, 10.
32. Ironside, "Using Narrative Pedagogy: Learning and Practising Interpretive Thinking," 485.
33. Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," 8.
34. Max van Manen. "Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching," *Curriculum Inquiry* 24.2 (1994): 159.
35. Walter Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," *Communication Monographs* 52 (1985): 351.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," 8.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," 349-350.
41. Sklar, "Narrative as Experience," 484.
42. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," 362.
43. Conle, "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula," 5.
44. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," 349-350.
45. To read more about the benefits for *sympathetic witnesses*, see Sklar, "Narrative as Experience," 481-501.
46. van Manen, "Narrative Identity in Teaching," 152.
47. Brown, Kirkpatrick, Mangum, and Avery, "A Review of Narrative Pedagogy Strategies to Transform Traditional Nursing Education," 284.
48. To read more about the affective and cognitive dimensions of sympathy in relation to audience experiences with fictional characters, see Sklar, "Narrative as Experience," 483.
49. Brown, Kirkpatrick, Mangum, and Avery, "A Review of Narrative Pedagogy Strategies to Transform Traditional Nursing Education," 284.
50. Sklar, "Narrative as Experience," 492.
51. See Squire, "Memory Systems of the Brain: A Brief History and Current Perspective." Also see Burgess, Maguire, and O'Keefe, "The Human Hippocampus and Spatial and Episodic Memory."
52. Van Manen, "Narrative Identity in Teaching," 160.