

Jim Phelan 0:29

This is Jim Phelan, director project narrative at The Ohio State University. And I'd like to welcome you to the first project narrative podcast. In each episode of the podcast, a narrative theorist will select a short narrative to read and then discuss with me or another host. Today I'll be talking with Katra Byram, who has selected a text from a slam poetry performance called, "Behind Us, My Country" by Babak Ghassim, and Usama Elyas. As you'll soon hear, it's a narrative form for two voices.

Jim Phelan 1:06

Katra is associate professor in the Department of German Language and Literature at Ohio State and a core faculty member of Project Narrative. Katra has done important work in multiple fields, especially in narrative theory, and in German literature and culture from 1848 to the present. All her work is marked by her interest in understanding how specific historically and culturally marked identities and experiences take shape, in particular linguistic, narrative, and artistic forms. Katra offers a powerful demonstration of the theoretical and interpretive consequences that follow from this interest in her 2015 book, *Ethics and the Dynamic Observer Narrator: Reckoning with Past and Present in German Literature*, from the theory and interpretation of narrative series at Ohio State Press. Among Katra's current projects, is a book on novels and memoirs about mothers in the World War Two era along with Faye Halpern of the University of Calgary, Katra and I are co editors of the book series at OSU press on the theory and interpretation of narrative. Katra and I will now read "Behind Us, My Country," by Babak Ghassim and Usama Elyas.

Katra Byram 2:31

Behind us, my country, everything that I am was born there.

Jim Phelan 2:37

Everything that was home to me, the field where we played as kids, the smile of my first love, the old apple tree in the park, and the little lake hidden behind the mountain.

Katra Byram 2:48

The hot tea on the tea tray. The wrinkled storytellers—smile lines of door into their faces, horsing around on the way home from school,

Jim Phelan 2:58

Waiting at night until my parents were asleep, and then going out again, by brothers squeaky bike, Neruda's poems, and the smell of wet grass.

Katra Byram 3:09

Radios that broadcast tormented sounds as if they were melodies.

Jim Phelan 3:14

My sister singing in the morning, my mother, my mother, with her eternal money worries. And I don't know why—ladybugs—

Katra Byram 3:23

All of that was home to me. All of that was once home to me. But I couldn't stay there. Behind us. The war, my parents fresh grave. The last clod of Earth still rows down still hasn't come to rest. That's how fresh my sorrow is. And I haven't processed any of it.

Jim Phelan 3:43

I couldn't stay there. People talked about us as destined for death, our people forced into trains that glide away into the smoke of the locomotives. Our doors smashed, display windows and shards, our parents afraid, siblings abused, and horrible reports from friends. The ones who were still there, most had disappeared.

Katra Byram 4:07

It was impossible to stay not a single day longer. The next step out of my city was the last step out of my country. And the worst step then onto this rusty boat that will roll it first. That will hold us at first. Then it will sink give us up to the sea. In the sea so bleak. The moon hides behind the clouds the afterwards so dark, you see nothing.

Jim Phelan 4:33

For hours, nothing. And when I close my eyes in the dark, I hear my mother's voice around us only the sea, as if our boat was the heart of the universe. I opened my eyes and whisper to heaven. Prayers are our sail.

Katra Byram 4:51

life preservers will take care of the rest but they can't carry hope. A man swims to me. You take over, I can't do it anymore. He's a year old and his name is Bossom and slides out of his vest into the internal, eternal dark blue. This way, I become a father for the first time in the water. By handoff, the man in the vest gave me his inheritance as legacy.

Jim Phelan 5:18

Arrived in exile, I learned quickly. The most important words are visa, excuse me, and thank you

Katra Byram 5:27

arrived in exile, I saw a family reunited after a long time, how the father whimpered for joy, mute and from the depths of his being, with all the shame of a person who seldom cries. I followed the families every step, but only with my eyes

Jim Phelan 5:45

arrived in exile, but the soil of homes sticks to the soles of your feet. Because I'm from there, and I have memories. I was born how people are born. I have a mother who loves me, and it breaks my heart. In the letters that she wrote me. I see how her hand has begun to tremble. When I say home sick now I say, *dream*, because my old home hardly exists. And if we stay here, we become like the beach. Not quite sea, not quite land.

Katra Byram 6:20

And if we stay we will become like the beach not quite sea, not quite land, arrived in exile. One crowd welcomes me, the other runs up its foreign flag. Sometimes you sense the love, sometimes you sense the hate—you, they look at your headscarf, me, they look at my passport, but don't be

angry at them Habibi, forgive them. They forgot love, they forgot the Bible. Wish them peace.
No, show them where Weeble Wobbles, knock us off our feet, and we'll walk on our hands,

Jim Phelan 6:54

knock us off our feet, and we'll walk on our hands, make the best of our lives until our lives end.
And who knows. Maybe I'll go home one day, and everything won't have changed. Maybe I'll
see our old apple tree where the playing field behind the rust brown fence and I'll embrace my
siblings. And I'll kiss my mother and happiness will bite its teeth into my heart.

Katra Byram 7:21

My name is Ahmed Yousef, father of Bossom. And I am a refugee. I fled Syria.

Jim Phelan 7:28

My name is Daniel Levy. And I am a refugee. I fled Germany. The year is 2015. The year is
1938.

So Katra, why did you choose this narrative poem? For today's podcast?

Katra Byram 7:49

Well, I've been teaching this poem in some of my classes for a number of years. And the students
are always very affected by it, they find it really powerful. And they find the experience of
listening to it and of reading it very powerful. And so I thought it would be a good one to share
here today.

Jim Phelan 8:08

Great. Okay. There are a couple of translation issues that I'd like to hear your thoughts about.
First, the translation from German to English. And then second, the translation across media,
from slam performance to written text to our reading aloud in a way that's different from a slam
performance.

Katra Byram 8:28

Yeah, so I mean, in this case, it's interesting because I think those those two issues of translation between language and also between setting are also very related because the language and the sound in the original German is very much tied to the fact that it was a slam poetry performance. And it has that sound and I actually just want to read a short passage of it in German write to so that you can hear a little bit what it sounds like and this is the part in the poem that, let's see, I'm going to read it again in English first.

Katra Byram 9:08

The sometimes you sense the love, sometimes you sense the hate, you, they look at your headscarf, me, they look at my passport, but don't be angry at them Habibi, forgive them. They forgot love. They forgot the Bible. Wish them peace. No, show them. So this is what it sounds like in German: And I'm going to try a little bit to reproduce the pace of the original or of what you can hear if you go listen to it on YouTube. So... (Katra reads in German)

Jim Phelan 9:55

Great. Yeah, that's really good to hear the original and it just you know, aural. Yes. Yeah. Signifying in that passage very clearly. Yeah.

Katra Byram 10:07

I mean, I think you can feel the original language. There's so much poetically going on in terms of the repetition of sounds both consonant and vowel sounds and rhymes, which, of course, all of that gets lost in translation or is very hard to preserve. If you're also preserving the, the meat, trying to stay literal this to the semantics. Yeah, exactly. And I mean, I really think you hear in that language, also the slam tradition, or, it sounds a little bit. I mean, you know, there, there's the especially the one line ... Where it sounds to me like something that could come out of Hamilton except in German, right? It's right. It's—it's those kinds of rhythms. Which you you lose in a translation.

Jim Phelan 11:01

Yeah. Yeah. So would you say anything about that rhythm in relationship to the sense? I mean, just that sort of old sound and sense kind of question?

Katra Byram 11:11

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And I think and but this also comes into the question of talking about it as something that you would hear initially in a slam performance or talking about it as a text that's on a page that we can now look at and talk about, because if we start looking at the way that the rhyme patterns work, we can start looking at the words that are associated via rhyme. So the words hate and passport, our end rhymes on these lines. So hate and passport are associated through these rhymes, as are the word vergessen, which is repeated twice in that line, which means they forgot, right? And in the case here, what they forgot is love and the Bible. So we have hate passport and this forgetting of love in the Bible, that are all rhymes through this passage. And then we have these long, E sounds our love, Bible and peace. In those last two lines, yeah. Great. So it's—

Jim Phelan 12:18

those strong associations through the sound really reinforcing. Yeah, these thematic sort of associations or thematic clusters in a way. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Alright, so you know, this poem, obviously has a twist. And we do want to get to that. But before we do, I'd like to talk with you about the narrative leading up to the twist. So what do you see as some of the most significant salient features of the, you know, the lead-up?

Katra Byram 12:53

Well, I mean, I think the story is constructed in through these two voices in the lead up to the twist to really encourage us as listeners, to more or less equate the experiences of the two different speakers. So this happens, I think, in a number of ways. One is that all of the stations of the story, if you want to put it that way, are the same, they have childhood memories. They think about their mothers, they think about their siblings, we have then flight from the homeland, the need to leave and then the actual flight. We have the simultaneous so to speak, arrival in that we hear one arrives and the other arrives, and they face similar challenges when they arrive in exile. So there are all of these parallel experiences, right? And those are really emphasized, by the way that the final line of one speaker and the starting line of the next speaker often echo each other. Right. So that—

Jim Phelan 13:53

right so one, you know, one inference anyway, initially, right that I made was, Oh, they're brothers. Right? I mean, do you feel like I'm over-reading when I when I do that? Are you feel like I'm following the lead of, of the construction? Or?

Katra Byram 14:08

Yeah, I mean, I do think that's definitely possible following the lead of the construction.

Jim Phelan 14:15

Behind us, my country and then you know, the next one, yeah, then it just, you know, the "us" anyway. You know, associating the "us" with the two Yeah—

Katra Byram 14:26

are we it is a we and that way that's presented here, even we we get that we get that we before we ever encounter the Is, so to speak. Yeah.

Jim Phelan 14:38

Yeah. Yeah. So maybe we could talk just a little bit about some of the thematic things that they do share in common, right. So you mentioned them just maybe elaborate a little bit more on, you know, childhood, family, memory, you know, those kinds of things.

Katra Byram 14:57

Well, one of the things that I think is striking about The childhood, the evocation of childhood is how it really works with concrete images in both cases. So we have these very specific snapshots of the kind of thing, you know, the images that stick in your head, the, the splinters of, of memory, that are these really strong images that stick in your head.

Jim Phelan 15:23

Yeah, there's almost like a kind of, you know, lyric dimension in the sense of, you know, evoking a moment, you know, a snapshot, as you say, and then, you know, we get that sort of a

series of these kinds of things. Yeah, so that sense of attachment, and loss seems to kind of come out through that patterning of these lyric moments.

Katra Byram 15:52

Yes, it evokes a lost world, a world of sights and scents. And, yeah, that that kind of very tactical, tactile experience at the beginning. Yeah.

Jim Phelan 16:05

Great. So then maybe we could talk a little bit about what you said, pick up on what you said about the repetition of, you know, phrases as we move from speaker to speaker. Right. That's one thing that the translation does keep? Right. I mean, you know, so, you know, that was my home, arrived in exile. That those are just a couple that, that we get. We're gonna say something about about those sort of the patterning? Yeah, repetition.

Katra Byram 16:40

I think, you know, the one that you mentioned, arrived in exile, I think is a really important one, because it's the one that appears it actually appears four times in four successive turns. And I think that it really, in a way, it helps tell the audience where we've arrived, which is the focus on the exile. I mean, there's this past that is lost. But the focus now is on where we've arrived, which is this place of displacement. And the experience of both of these people in displacement.

Jim Phelan 17:16

Yeah. And that sort of gets explored more fully, then the memory. I mean, the memory is there, and it's important, but then it's sort of like, okay, here we are, and let's explore that.

Katra Byram 17:27

Yeah, some of the longest passages are definitely of these passages of arrival and what that's like, of belonging and not belonging, of being welcomed and not welcomed.

Jim Phelan 17:38

Right. Right. Yeah. So that I think leads us to the image of the beach, right, the not quite sea, not quite land. You know, that's pretty evocative. But you have maybe further thoughts about that as a way to capture this arise in exile.

Katra Byram 17:56

Well, I think it's kind of interesting, too, because if we went from the beginning, which was so concrete, and is so clearly evoking a specific place and a specific experience, in this section, where we get that metaphor of the beach, or we get the metaphor of what I've translated as Weeble Wobbles the ... mentioned, or we get the metaphor of the, the heart at the end, and the teeth biting into the heart, we've moved away from that very concrete experience into a much more universal or generalized or, through these metaphors, a human experience that is not so specifically tied to a particular world. And this world of exile is a world that is evil evoked in those metaphorical terms

Jim Phelan 18:58

and yet at the same time, the, the metaphor is one of space or place, right. I mean, it's, it's, you know, the so in a way that that there's continuity with the contrast with the beach for sure. Ah, yeah. Yeah, that's what I was thinking. Yeah.

Katra Byram 19:18

Of course, the thing about a beach too, is that they're between the waves in the land, the beach is what always gets battered.

Jim Phelan 19:25

Yes, yes. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Katra Byram 19:29

And I don't know, this is maybe the place to bring it up. But the beach is also a very powerful image from the context of this particular poem. So what's interesting here is that this poem was originally performed in 2015 in Germany amidst the wave of refugees from Syria, right. And perhaps the most iconic image and the most searing image from that whole era was the image of

this of a drowned toddler boy on a beach, in the waves. And so in a way, this is this part here becomes metaphorical. And in a way, it isn't metaphorical, if you think of the audience who would have been listening and for whom that image is likely to evoke a historical...here, and it's very fresh. Right? This would have just been in the news.

Jim Phelan 20:33

Right. Right. Right. So that yeah, the connection between sort of intertextual and the extratextual and and sort of, you know, the anticipation or even maybe assumption that the audience would make that association to the historical event. Yeah. Yeah. And that particular image. Yeah. Yeah. So you know, one of the other things that's really, you know, in terms of events, right, in the, in the before we get to the twist, is the delivery of the child, right? Bossam, right. So how does that how does that play into some of these other things that we've been talking about?

Katra Byram 21:23

Well, one of the themes that we already mentioned, that we get in this poem is the idea of family and a family left behind in the home country. And of being separated from family, the idea of receiving the letters from the mother and seeing in a distance that the mother is weakening through her handwriting. So we get this idea of families disrupted and, and broken apart. And that happens very dramatically in this instance, where the boy's father gives up and hands the boy over to the speaker, the breaking off of a familial chain, and then the unchosen unforeseen attempt to pick up and move forward with some different kinds of family then here, you suddenly are, you know, and in the original in the, or in the recording that you can hear online of the performance to the line here, it's, there's a question in this line, and this is the way I'm going to become a father? Yeah, right. Right. Yeah. By hand off in the water? Yeah. It's not what one imagines for oneself.

Jim Phelan 22:48

Yeah. Right. But then it becomes part of his identity. Right. I mean, that's part of what he claims when He identifies Himself.

Katra Byram 22:56

Yes, absolutely. At the end, at the end, that has become the new reality that has become the family connection. Yeah. That he has, it's the only one that he has. We we can assume, I think here

Jim Phelan 23:07

Yeah, yeah. And there's maybe something about, you know, family and, you know, being from the same country or from the same, you know, situation, right. So that there's, maybe there's something about this experience, as you say, you know, in a sort of technical sense, leading to new family formations, right. But maybe there's also a sense in which, you know, the commonality of the experience is transcends what we usually think of as family so that he would you know, say okay, yes, I will become father this will be part of my identity. And that move Yeah,

Katra Byram 23:54

yeah, he says, you know, he says the man in the vest gave me his inheritance as legacy it becomes his legacy, too, they have this shared it is a legacy, a shared legacy of the experience and of the flight.

Jim Phelan 24:14

So, are there other significant things before we get to the twist, that you'd like to touch on?

Katra Byram 24:21

Um, well, maybe we should talk about the twist and because other things we might want to talk about, we might come back to in the light of the twist, right, right.

Jim Phelan 24:31

Okay, good. Alright. So, one thing about a twist, you know, typically we think you know, narrative progression and things like that is that a successful twist, typically, you know, is something that in retrospect, we can see it there are some preparation for it right? We go back and we say, Oh, okay. This this detail, I now see it signifies in a somewhat different way, etc. How do you see that Do you think this poem, you know conforms to that typical pattern?

Katra Byram 25:05

I absolutely do. I think one of the first hints or looking back one of the first places we see this is probably in the mention—well, it could be already in the landscape, actually from the second line where we talked about the little lake hidden behind the mountain. And but I think also very specifically, we get in the second line, Babak Ghassim's second line, the reference, or the allusion to Neruda's poems, which, of course, would have been relatively new, right contemporary, the 30s and the 30s. And so this is already looking back.

Jim Phelan 25:46

Yeah. And less likely to be circulating in Syria—

Katra Byram 25:50

in 2015. Yes, exactly. So I think that that's already a place where we start to see it. And I have to convince I have to admit that I don't know a lot about the Entomology of Syria. I don't know about ladybugs. Ladybugs are certainly a German insect with a lot of connections, kind of cultural connections and stories connected to it.

Jim Phelan 26:20

Talk a little bit about some of those cultural connections.

Katra Byram 26:23

Well, there's a children's nursery rhyme that essentially goes, "Ladybug fly. Your father is at war. Your mother is in Pomern Land, Pomern Land has all burned down. Ladybug fly, and it's from the 30 Years War actually. But so this association of the ladybug with a background of war and destruction, is there. Right.

Jim Phelan 26:57

Right. Right. Right. So there's the in the preface of that, but the I don't know why, right. Sort of the hate could see the poet working behind the speaker in that way. Right. So invite again, if you if you know, that cultural context, then you do know why. Ladybugs are in the poem.

Katra Byram 27:14

Yeah. And the associations that are there. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And then there come much more concrete associations. So when he's talking about trains that glide away into the smoke of the locomotives, our doors smashed display windows and shards. Those are, of course, iconic images of trains taking Jewish victims to their deaths in the Holocaust, of the first destruction in the Night of Broken Glass. Yeah, in the night in 1938. So these are very specific references that in retrospect, right, we can see as belonging to that story.

Jim Phelan 27:55

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Good. Okay, well, then let's let's talk about some of the, you know, sort of reconfigurations or reinterpretations that the twist kind of invites, or at least, you know, pushes us toward or something like that. So one, one that stood out for me, was the sort of a clear mark of this narrative poem as well—I've switched my reading mode from nonfiction to fiction. Right. And so I mean, once one sense that's like, Oh, all right. No, but but maybe we could talk a little bit about some of the consequences of of that shift.

Katra Byram 28:44

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think that's, that's also something worth mentioning, to go all the way back to your first question about the difference between the original performance and say, us reading it here. Because I think readers, those of you listening today, listeners didn't get the same sense of this poem as people who would have gotten it had they gone to the club where this was originally performed. It was actually part of a performance by a troupe of performers. And it's largely also a comedy. There's comedy around it. And it's a group of performance who are all as they say, in German, ... , meaning they have migration background, none of them are ethnic Germans. They're all people whose families have migrated to Germany, and they're mostly from the Middle East. And so, the two performers on stage with the names that they have, and hearing and performing this play, or this this poem, I think it's very likely for people in the audience to take their performance as a statement of truth and have autobiographic kind of testimony, even though if you stop to think about it for a second, it's impossible for it to be that because these two speak completely unaccented German. They didn't just arrive. Okay. But there's something about

the invitation of slam poetry to associate the speaker directly with the story that's being told. Yeah. That I think, yeah, the mode would be of those people speaking for their communities probably. Right.

Jim Phelan 30:30

Right, so in a way they're taking advantage of that assumption expectation convention, maybe even and, and twisting. Yeah, that as well with this.

Katra Byram 30:38

Yeah, I think they're really working with it. It's another one of the elements along with all the parallels that I think lulls people into assuming that they know what the story is about, which in 2015, would obviously be about Syrian refugees, right? And so in the moment, when you learn that one of them isn't a Syrian refugee at all, it becomes fictional. Not only it becomes fictional, but I think it's a kind of a shocking way, because it's working against all of these assumptions. That have been just that people haven't been thinking about them. They've just been accepting them, as assumption. So I think it's, there's a lot more forceful surprise, than when you and I are sitting here reading it. And it's obvious to everyone from the beginning. Yeah, that it's fiction for us.

Jim Phelan 31:31

Or that we are inhabiting other voices anyway. Yeah. Right. Right. Whether that inhabit—Yeah, inhabiting is going in the direction of fiction could still be open. Right? Yeah.

Katra Byram 31:44

But then I think we take it differently. Because if you think of people up there, if you think of members of the audience, more or less, assuming that they're hearing testimony on behalf of a community say, and then you learn, No, one of these figures is in fact invented. Yeah. And the whole poem has been constructed to show the parallel nature of these experiences, right, then instead of becoming testimonial, it becomes I think, very political, right? Good in a way, that the originalism, if you assume that it's more or less straight testimony, that it's not political.

Jim Phelan 32:27

Right, right. So that you just go back to a couple things you said before about—Okay, you know, in 2015, you know, the Syrian refugees are coming into the country, Germany, and other parts of Europe, so, and there's this, you can correct me on this. Right. But my sense is that the contemporary reception of that by, you know, people who are native to German, and so on was, this is an extraordinary event. This is this is something we've never seen before, anything like that. Right. So part of the politics here might be a kind of, you know, counter narrative in a way to that one. Right. And just to make the parallel that you talked about between, you know, the Syrian refugees, and what happened in the Holocaust?

Katra Byram 33:20

Yeah, I mean, I think so people definitely saw it as an extraordinary event in 2015. There were half a million applications for asylum in Germany, which is a lot in one year. But it was there was a very clearly, Well, there were very different responses in Germany. So on the one hand, this arrival of refugees sparked, really the uptick of far right politics in Germany and in particular, the success in the last half a decade of the Alternative for Germany party, which is the far right party. On the other hand, there was a very strong what was called—I'm sorry, welcome culture of German citizens participating in all kinds of volunteer activities to support these refugees and to help them coming in and kind of parties at train stations more or less to welcome some of these trains coming in. So it was a very fraught political issue. In the present, right. And then we have the issue of taking that situation which was so conflictual and debated about how to see it, and putting it next to a story of the Jewish victim of Jewish victimization in the Holocaust, which is and has been the consensus of public German public culture for the last several decades. And so it's that these two stories that are parallel one that is so contested in the moment and the other, which is so clearly not contested.

Jim Phelan 35:21

Right. Right. And so there's sort of the ethical judgments associated with, you know, this the story of a Jewish victim. Right. Okay, we're all going to get behind that. We're going to get behind that story. We, you know, this is this is something that we've been trying to deal with since, you know—

Katra Byram 35:40

it's our responsibility. There's a there's a clause in the German post war constitution includes the right to asylum. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Because of that.

Jim Phelan 35:50

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. So then, yeah, when when you have this juxtaposition with one set of cultural assumptions and values, and then this other one, which, as you say, is more fraught. That's that's real, doing really important political work, I think. Yeah. Yeah. And, and to extent that they make it, you know, as you say, sort of more the twists, lands with a real force, right, then that adds to the force of the political dimension of the poem, I think.

Katra Byram 36:19

Yeah. And I think to this emphasis on, in this context, coming back to what we were talking about it, that the emphasis in the poem comes to be on the exile and the where they are now. Because I think they were speaking to an audience who had a choice to make about how to receive these people. Yes. And so it wasn't also just kind of an academic ethical debate. But a— here you are in this audience. And how do you react? Yeah. to Yusuf and Bossom. Essentially.

Jim Phelan 36:55

right, right. Yeah. Good. Yeah, that may be also one things that are curious about is there's so many parallels, right. But one of the big differences, of course, is that Yusuf has the child and Daniel doesn't, right. And so, you know, that may be as you say, right? It's it's reacting to both right? The refugee and the child, right. So one generation in the next generation, and that that has a sort of more urgency, and 2015. Or has a different kind of urgency anyway, then, then the Holocaust story.

Katra Byram 37:42

Yeah, well, I think I think that's true. And I think the other difference is, of course, we know the audience knows sitting there, how the Holocaust story ends, which is, there's this hopeful, right? There's this hopeful stanza toward the end, where he says, says, and maybe I will get to go home,

maybe I will see my mother again. And of course, in the moment that he says who he is, we know that no, there was no going home, there was no mother to go home to that hope for the future is a false hope. Right. But for the figures of Yusuf and Bossom. It doesn't have to be yes, there is an—and the child, I think that's a good point represents the fact that there is still hope for those figures, right, that that feature can look different than Daniel's they've been very similar up to this point, but from this point, they don't have to be similar. Yeah. And this is actually an irony of this is that of course, Daniel is the this figure of, of the Holocaust and the victims of the Holocaust, who today are symbols of pure victimhood often are often used that way and are seen that way. And of people deserving, of course, protection and support. But in 1938, when countries from all over the world met in Evian, France, to discuss the plight of Jews in Germany and to talk about refugee policy, the only country in the world to decide to take more refugees was the Dominican Republic. Wow. So—

Jim Phelan 39:36

I didn't know that.

Katra Byram 39:37

Yeah, the US, for instance, had its strict quotas based on the Johnson Reed act of 1924. And they stuck with those quotas. Wow. So you know, so the irony is that Daniel here becomes this figure. Of course, we need you know, Bossom and Yusuf deserve our protection the way Daniel does. But of course Daniel didn't get any when he was actually in that situation. So that's kind of interesting.

Jim Phelan 40:14

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So I think when you've already sort of started to talk about the, the way in which the twist, sort of reconfigures our understanding of the sort of the temporal location of each speaker, right? So you know, that that passage, who knows, maybe one day I'll go, maybe I'll go home one day, and everything won't have changed. Maybe I'll see our old apple tree, or the playing field behind the restaurant fence, and I'll embrace my siblings and kiss my mother. And, you know, I think when we're first reading it, we're thinking of this as, you know, time of the telling, right, 2015. And then we have to say, okay, 1938. And you've talked nicely, I think about

how, okay, that when once we make that move, then the next move is to say, Okay, well, no, you know, this, this won't happen. Do you see other sort of effects on the understanding of temporality, either there or in some of the other lines?

Katra Byram 41:24

I'm not sure. Do you have thoughts?

Jim Phelan 41:32

Well, I mean, I think, you know, again, the going back to what some of the things you were saying about the markers of that, in retrospect, we can see, as you know, preparing for the twist, right. So that the passage about the locomotives and the smashed windows and so on, right, it takes on a kind of urgency, I think maybe that, you know, it doesn't have when we're thinking about it seems so recent, in a way, right, it is, rather than—

Katra Byram 42:08

this rather than ancient the ancient history of 1938. Right. Yeah. Yeah. No, I think that's I think that's a good point. I think it's true, the parallel. Of course, the point in a way is to have the parallel work so that the lessons from 1938 are brought into the present. But the effect is also that 1938 comes much closer. Right? Yeah, good. Because Because of those same parallels. Yeah. And, you know, one thing that's often talked about, in talking about the Holocaust, is it's very hard to put yourself back into the space before the Holocaust now that we know what happened, and to say, Why didn't people leave? Or to put yourself in that mindset. And what happens here is again, that it becomes a surprising thing again, almost, or a... Because because we didn't know that that was the story we were coming to it somehow we can see it freshly maybe.

Jim Phelan 43:17

Yeah, good. Good. Another thought and this is maybe getting a little into some of the details of construction, but, you know, it strikes me that the narrative poem has the that the revelation about Daniel has to be second. Right. And because that's, that's really the biggest part of the twist. Right? So yeah, one twist with the idea, okay, that the poet and speaker are different, we move to fiction with with the Ahmed's declaration, right. But then it's, there's a bigger twist even

with with that, right. So if that's, if that makes sense. Right, then it's almost like we could go back and say, All right, it has to start. You know, Daniel has to come second, or is that right? In the turn taking? He's always got to be second. And, you know, as far as we had more time, and you know, we could we could look at maybe some of the ripple effects of that in terms of who gets the say wide and, you know, that kind of ordering. But anyway, does that make sense to you that?

Katra Byram 44:31

Yeah, yeah, I do. And I think it's interesting, too. I mean, as you say, we'd have to go back and look, but but in a way, it helps with the encouraging of the parallels, because it allows that first voice to plant some details that are very specific to and associated with the present situation. Yes. So that that becomes the frame. Yes. Right. For hearing the second story. Yes, yes.

Jim Phelan 44:59

Yeah, I like that line. I think that's I think that's very much on target. Yeah. Okay, well, um, are there other things that you'd like to talk about that we didn't get to?

Katra Byram 45:16

I think that I have talked about most of the things that I would say about this poem on a first, first nice conversation. And I, I would really encourage anyone who is curious about it, to go watch it on YouTube, because there are subtitles, along with the German performance. Yeah,

Jim Phelan 45:40

I recommend it too.

Katra Byram 45:42

So that's, that's maybe one of my last suggestions would be that to go to go hear the whole thing in the German and to see the presentation, I mean, we obviously can't go and see the slam the original slam performance, but see the presentation that the slam performers have put together to present on YouTube to get a little bit of the flavor back of what that initial performance and initial experience of it was. Because it really is, every year I have students come to class having

watched it, really powerfully affected by it. And so they are of course, getting the surprise in a way that our listeners won't. Right, but it's worth it's worth looking at. Right,

Jim Phelan 46:33

Okay. Great. Well, Carter, thank you so much. Thank you for going first in series here with the project narrative podcast. Well, thanks for having me, Jim. Yeah, and I want to thank everyone for listening. And also say that we'd appreciate any feedback you might have. You can send it to us at Projectnarrative@osu.edu, projectnarrative, one word, or on our Facebook page, which is just you could search for project narrative. Or you could send feedback to our Twitter account, which is @ PN Ohio State. Also, I want to advertise, our next project narrative podcast will feature Brian McHale and we're planning to record that on November 22. And Brian will read a series of short narrative poems under the rubric of stories with holes. Thank you all.

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