

Project Narrative Podcast Episode 5

Transcript

Amy Shuman 00:10

The feeling of - of not being quite human. How do you narrate, not being - feeling like you have been treated as inhuman, not human, not feeling like you are human. Having day to day survival, which is not even only just getting food but really, day to day, minute to minute survival as the only narratable experience, because how do you narrate not being human?

Jim Phelan 00:52

This is Jim Phelan, Director of Project Narrative at The Ohio State University, and I'd like to welcome you to the Project Narrative podcast. In each episode, a narrative theorist selects a short narrative to read and discuss with me or another host. Today, I'll be talking with Amy Shuman who has selected two stories of "waiting" from Charles Rutenesha's memoir in progress about his experiences in Rwanda in the early 1990s, and then later as a refugee. Amy will give us more context for the stories before she reads them. Amy will read the first story, "Waiting to be Arrested," and then she and I will discuss it. Then Amy will go on and read the second story, "Waiting to be Released," and we'll discuss that and make some comparisons with "Waiting to be Arrested." Amy Shuman is a Professor of English at Ohio State University and a core faculty member of Project Narrative. Amy is a recipient of OSU's Distinguished Scholar Award and its Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award. Amy has done important research in the fields of folklore, sociolinguistics and conversational narrative, human rights, and disability studies. She's the author of *Storytelling Rights: The Uses of Oral and Written Texts by Urban Adolescents*, *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy*, and with Carol Bohmer, *Rejecting Refugees: Political Asylum in the 21st Century*. Amy has been a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow at the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem. So, Amy, why did you choose these stories of waiting from Charles Rutenesha's memoir to read and discuss today?

Amy Shuman 02:44

So I've been working on narrative - the narratives told by political asylum seekers for the last 20-plus years. My colleague, Carol Bohmer, and I have been working with asylum seekers. She's a sociologist and a lawyer. So the work really started with her. She takes cases that are given to her by lawyers that she knows and she works pro bono in helping asylum seekers. So we've worked with several asylum seekers, and we've come to learn that narrative is really the core of the success of their cases. Mostly, they only have their narratives, they don't have any other documentation to prove that they deserve political asylum. Carol left Ohio State many years ago, and then taught at Dartmouth and at King's College in London. And she's then continued with cases in the Northeast of the United States and in - and in the UK. Charles Rutenesha, who I met in the 90s, had come to Ohio State, to get a degree in law at the Moritz College of Law, and we became friends. And in the last many years, it's actually been about ten years, we've

been - I've been recording his stories, because he wants to write his memoir. So I'll tell a little bit more about him. But first, I selected these particular stories, because I'm interested in different kinds of narratives, especially the narratives of flight, escape, capture, and waiting narratives. And - and - and Charles just gives us some very good examples of - of waiting narratives that I think we know very little about. So Charles was, as - as we'll hear in his story, but I'll give you some context, so before the genocide in Rwanda, Tutsi were being arrested. The Tutsi in the north, there were Tutsi in the very northern part of the country, who were rebels long, long - long historical story, and at this particular point in time, Tutsi all over the country were finding themselves being arrested for no reason at all. They weren't associated with the rebels in the north. So - so this is before the genocide, and Charles was arrested, as we'll learn, and imprisoned. And so that's a big part of his narrative. And he feels very strongly that we don't understand much about that period, about - and what it was like to be imprisoned, in part because not a lot of people survived. And those who did survive aren't in a position to tell their stories.

Jim Phelan 05:35

Right, right. Yeah. Okay. Well, good. Is there anything else that you'd like our listeners to know before you read the first one?

Amy Shuman 05:44

So I'm interested, as a narratologist, in questions of chronotopes, or questions - questions of temporality. And if we recall, Tolstoy's now-famous comment that all great literature is one of two stories, a man goes on a journey, or a stranger comes to town, we - most narratologists would find that overly simplified. But I think one of the things that's particularly left out of that is narratives of waiting. Some feminists have called attention to the fact that even in the famous stories of men going on journeys, there are women waiting at home.

Jim Phelan 06:21

Right, right. Or women can go on journeys!

Amy Shuman 06:23

Or women go on journeys, and - right, right. But - but there are lots of critiques of that, but really not a lot is understood about it. And as you and I will talk about today, it's difficult to narrate waiting. And that's maybe part of it, we don't have a lot of examples of it. And I'm hoping that we will consider how these different kinds of space-time correspondences, things that happen in a specific place and time, form different kinds of chronotopes. And then we want to ask the question - two questions. First is, can they be considered as different genres, as Bakhtin famously suggested, that chronotopes point to different kinds of genres. But second, the thing that really interests me in my political asylum work is that the political asylum hearings focus primarily on questions of space and time. And the hearing officers consider space to be very locatable and identifiable, even though it may not be, and time they consider to be less specific. And they focus so much time on these questions of what happened to you, how long did it happen? When did you leave? How - how many times were you arrested? Time-related questions. And - and I'm always puzzled by the fact that they think that these action-

related narrations will lead them to an assessment of whether somebody has a well-founded fear, which is an emotion, of returning to their home country. So I'm interested also in temporality as it guides us through thinking both about action and emotion.

Jim Phelan 08:07

Okay, that's great, terrific. Okay. So here's Amy Shuman reading, "Waiting to be Arrested."

Amy Shuman 08:18

So Charles is, I should say, a native speaker, both of Kinyarwanda, and also of French. So, he spoke - that is, he and I've worked on this together, but he first told the story orally to me, and then we transcribed it, and then we worked together on the written version of it. So what you're hearing is somewhat edited, and - and not in his native language, it's in English.

I was not surprised to be arrested. Between October 1 and October 23 could be a book by itself. It was a hell. When they attacked, the government put roadblocks every 50 meters with military in full combat. We used to have buses that would take us to work. During the day, there would be soldiers, troops, police, intelligence. They would come everywhere, to businesses, ministries in the neighborhood. All day they were arresting people. During the day, we worked seven to five, and we had a break from twelve to one. At every minute we were waiting because so many of our colleagues were arrested at the workplace. On the way back home, there were intelligence, police and military that would stop at every bus stop. For example, they would say, "Is Charles Rutensha here?", and you had to show your ID. If you tried to hide, it would be terrible. On your way back home, you expected to be arrested. When you got home until four in the morning, you expected to be arrested. It was mental torture. As you started to fall asleep, you could feel they could be coming and you would be arrested. At a certain point, I said I wanted to be arrested. I would just turn myself in, so I would have peace of mind. I wouldn't have the constant fear of being arrested. When the time came, it was the second of October. I was arrested by intelligence people from the president's office. They said, "Who is Charles Rutensha? Okay, come." And inside the car, there were two more people. We left the ministry, and we went to another place. They arrested two more people. They said, "Where do you live?" We went to my house, and they went all through it. They searched everywhere. They looked at pictures and asked, "Who is this?" By the time they left, it was a mess. The presidential guards tortured us. I still have the cloth I wore that day. I still have the shirt I wore that day. We were beaten up that night. And then we went to sleep in some small jail. There were 100 people in a small room. In the morning, we went for questioning. They said, "We would like to know about the king in Washington who is supposed to get married, and you are supposed to be his best man." I was not even born at the time of that King. It was just a formality to have something to write in my file. They made me write a statement. I wrote three pages. They phoned in the evening and put me in jail in the prison called 1930.

Jim Phelan 11:22

Okay, great. So, you know, a couple of things that stand out to me, and then you can comment, and we'll go from there, is that we sort of start with this summary statement, right, "I was not surprised to be arrested," right? So we know, somehow, where we're going-- waiting to be

arrested, but we know there's - he's gonna be arrested. But there's also the, you know, the emotion, right? "I was not surprised." So it's an interesting, and I think, very, kind of, effective way to begin this story. And then we go to between October 1 and October 23rd, could be a book by itself. So we get this single event of being arrested, and then we immediately go back, and then we - where he's gonna tell us about, you know, this whole three - three week period or so. And then we get "it was a hell," and so on. And then we get a kind of, you know, what Genette would call iterative narration about, you know, many things happening, but being narrated once, right? And then in the second half, we get a more singulative day, the day of the arrest, right? So anyway, you know, what's - what stands out to you in that in that sort of initial big picture handling of time?

Amy Shuman 12:51

Well, part of what stands out to me is the - is the generalized description, "During the day, there would be - they would come everywhere, that - that we -" and that it's plural, "We were waiting." So we have this very generalized picture, and he's not particularly singled out.

Jim Phelan 13:14

Okay, good. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. And so in that sense, his own experience becomes a collective kind of experience. And, you know, also from the perspective of, you know, waiting and narrative action, right, we have this, you know, there's an instability, right? They're waiting to be arrested, and this is what the day is like, right? And so on. Right.

Amy Shuman 13:41

Right. And I'm interested in how these shifts in - in pronouns help to shift the footing of the narrative, that is, who we are as listeners being aligned to, who he's aligned with. And that also constitutes an instability, this shift. And then when we finally get, at the end, to the "I," we will have really shifted, creating this instability of footing.

Jim Phelan 14:08

Yes, good. And then the other, you know, important pronoun, obviously, maybe it's just pointing out the obvious, but the "they," right, so there's a "we" and the "they"--"they would come every day," right? And then we have the shift to the second person, you know, after, "They would say, 'Is Charles Rutenesha here?' And you had to show your ID, if you tried to hide," you know, again.

Amy Shuman 14:34

It's fascinating

Jim Phelan 14:35

It's not the single - first person singular, "I had to show my ID." "*You* had to show your ID."

Amy Shuman 14:39

Right, even though it's his name, right? So he is named and the immediate following sentence, as you said, is, *you* had to show your ID, if *you* tried to hide, on *your* way back home.

Jim Phelan 14:51

Yeah, yeah. So again, the collective, right, he's not - you know, for this first half of the - of the story, he's really resisting being an "I," right, after the first sentence. It's all about the "we" as you're saying. Okay. Then though, right. I think we have, you know, an interesting turning point in that way. "It was mental torture as you start to fall asleep, you felt they could be coming and you would be arrested." Then the turning point, "At a certain point, I said, I wanted to be arrested."

Amy Shuman 15:31

Right. So we've switched to "I" here. And also, "At a certain point." So we've switched from this generalized fear and panic and desperation of waiting to a certain point. And that temporality, I think, is very interesting. "At a certain point, I wanted to be arrested." I had enough, in a sense, is what he's saying. And we know, what I'd had enough means, that registers for us, it points to an emotional state.

Jim Phelan 15:58

Right. Right. Right. And in a way, it's - it is a little, on the one hand, it's surprising, on the other hand, it's logic - you know, emotionally logical, that is, in a sense, if we're thinking about, again, the narrative movement, that - there's this instability, right? So, and the instability is, they want to arrest me and us, and I don't want to be arrested. We try to avoid that, right? But then the shift to, you know, alright, I - at a certain point, I wanted to be arrested.

Amy Shuman 16:27

Right, which takes us back to, "I was not surprised to be arrested," the very first sentence, right? And so this - this certain point where he said, "I wanted to be arrested. I would just turn myself in, so I would have peace of mind," is not referring to something that happened. And that interests me greatly, right. So this is not, even though he says, "At a certain point," and he said it, and we have - we have - we have all kinds of reasons to think this really happened, right? We have, "At a certain point," and we have him using reported speech, "I said, "I wanted to be - " not just, I thought, but I said, which are very definite. And yet, these are not pointing to things that happen. These are pointing only to emotion.

Jim Phelan 17:14

Right. Well, or, to an internal action. "I said I wanted to be arrested," this was a switch in me, in a way. Yeah. Right.

Amy Shuman 17:21

"So I would have peace of mind." Right.

Jim Phelan 17:25

Right. Then the interesting thing, again, in terms of the action is, "I would - I would just turn myself in," this hypothetical or subjunctive, right, but he doesn't turn himself in, right? Instead, they - they come for him, right? "I was arrested by intelligence people." So, you know, that's

interesting too, right? And maybe there's a gap there, like, Well, why didn't you turn yourself in? Was it that they acted - you know, again, in terms of time, they acted before you could do that? Or, you know, just how -

Amy Shuman 17:59

Well, this is one of the things that really interests me in these kind of narratives, generally, but I think, works differently in a waiting narrative, which is the template that we might impose on the experience of - of anticipating violence. And the problem that - that - that Charles would - he, by the way, had a Fulbright to come to Ohio State, and so he had a visa, he was able to eventually leave. But if somebody comes as a - as a applicant for political asylum, the template that gets imposed immediately is, why didn't you leave? If you were afraid, why didn't you leave? And this is a question that Holocaust scholars have explored. Lawrence Langer, for example, talks about these spurious questions that lead to spurious templates. The idea that, in that moment, that you might have known that maybe you should leave. It's only retrospectively, so that gap you're pointing to is related to that template of the present template being imposed on what people knew. It's really an epistemological problem. You know, what did you know at the time. And so he wants to be arrested, but he didn't know that he would be arrested.

Jim Phelan 19:20

Right. And I think what you're pointing to, too, is the way in which the, you know, people receiving the asylum narratives can't get out of their own, you know, temporal location, right? We all know now that you should have - it would have been wiser to have left.

Amy Shuman 19:37

You should have left, right. There was gonna be a genocide in two years. What were you sticking around for?

Jim Phelan 19:42

Exactly. Right. Yeah. So that yeah, that - that's a really good point. All right. So then, I think, a couple of other things, just in terms of the - what Charles is doing with dialogue and voice, right. So the first time we have, "They would say, is Charles Rutenesha here?" Now they say, "Who is Charles Rutenesha? Okay, come." Right? So there's an interesting, sort of, presupposition. Like, in the first one, they know who Charles Rutenesha - they seem to know, and they want to know, is he here? And now it's all, who is he? You know, the identity thing. And then also the addition of, you know, "Okay, come," right? So that's, you know, any thoughts on what's going on with - with dialogue and the voice?

Amy Shuman 20:42

Well, you know, this is interpolation as we know it, right, that you're being singled out. This is the call that comes for you. And we have the idea that the call might come for you. You know, is, is Charles Rutenesha here on the bus? But that was just--Okay, oh, no, we're not gonna ask you to come, that was just, show us your ID. And then we get the call. The - this is the moment, the call. You are being targeted. This - this call, Charles, is for you. Okay, come. And so it's this

mandated "come" that, that changes everything. And then we get - what's interesting is after that, we then get a lot of detail. "Inside the car, there were two more people. We left the ministry, we went to another place. They arrested two more people." We don't know how many people were arrested at his place of work. Maybe just him. We don't know. But, you know, - so there's this very specific, very different reported speech, you know, when they say, "Where do you live?" And so we're now in a very specific action-based part of the narrative.

Jim Phelan 21:56

Right. Right. And I think there's also this interesting, sort of, continuation of the collective, even as he's moving through his individual experience, right, because, you know, there were two more in the car. Well, there were two more people who've been arrested, right. And then they arrested two more, and then we went, right. So it's interesting, you know, the collective remains, even as he's - he has shifted focus more to his experience. "We were beaten up that night."

Amy Shuman 22:28

Right. "The presidential guards tortured us." And so he's very much experiencing all of this as a we, as a collective we. The "you," we could return to that later, is very interesting, you know, that on your way back home, you expected to be arrested. The "you" is not the same as - it's the same group of people, but it operates differently in the narrative, because we're - we're only able to talk about these two excerpts today, but the rest of the narrative describes his experience in prison, which is definitely a collective we, where he feels that he is among these other people all trying to survive very, very horrible circumstances, day to day. Again, the balance of the immediate day, the - the long waiting, but I think we see that here too. Where, where he's identified as a "we" and then back to himself. "I still have the cloth I wore that day," which is retrospective, right? That's - that's today, telling the narrative.

Jim Phelan 23:38

That's right. Yeah. I mean, that - that is an interesting shift, right, from his perspective, at the time of the action to his perspective at the time of the telling, right. "I still have" is - it's a tense shift too, right? The present, "I still have it," right. Yeah. And that - that, I think, also starts to connect to some of the way in which the affect and the emotion is being handled, right? So, you know, like with the - the first question, "Is Charles here," right? "And you had to show your ID, if you had to hide, it would be terrible. You expected to be arrested, you got home, you expected to be arrested, it was mental torture," right? That - the fact that it's simply a question of, I mean, what - I think it's interesting, what it kind of asks the audience to do, right, to make the connections between the, you know, simple question, "Are you present?", you know, it's like roll call or something. And then the consequences of that, right? Which he - which he tells, I think interestingly in a combination of action and emotion, right? And then here, you know, when we come back to it, "Okay, come," and so on, then we get the fears that he's kind of expressed. We see why he was afraid because they get realized in action, you know, in "they beat us, they -," all that - all that kind of stuff. Yeah. Okay, then we get the other, you know, the third sort of voicing from "they," right, "We would like to know about the King in Washington who is supposed to get married and you are supposed to be the best man."

Amy Shuman 25:26

Right. What a huge counterfactual, which is another instability, right, introduced into this narrative, that they have to come up with some crime that he's done, and so they come up with the crime of having been the best man of the king, who was married before Charles was born. And it doesn't matter. So the irrelevance of this counterfactual dropped into this narrative accentuates the entire sense of the arbitrariness of the arrest, right, that he knew he was going to be arrested, but we never find - and we don't seem to be asking, why were you arrested? What did they want you for? But he's telling us that there was no crime, that -and that's why he wants to write this book. I think that it's important to him to describe what it's like to be rounded up, because he's Tutsi at a moment when there is some fear of Tutsis. For no reason, actually,

Jim Phelan 26:25

Yeah, no, why - he's being arrested because he's Tutsi.

Amy Shuman 26:29

He's being arrested because he's Tutsi. That's it.

Jim Phelan 26:30

And the questions, right, the "Is Charles here?" Right? They're all about his Tutsi identity, right? "Who is Charles Rutenesha? Okay, come." Right? Yeah. Yeah. So that -

Amy Shuman 26:41

So - but to have that blatant counterfactual here. Usually what we might have is a counter-narrative, that is, something that could be substantiated. And then you say, No, that wasn't me. But something that couldn't even be possible is - it's intensifying the arbitrariness.

Jim Phelan 27:04

Yeah. And then I think, you know, as we're coming to the end, right, it's interesting that he immediately calls them out on the, you know, the absurdity of the question, right? And he knows, it's just a formality of something to have in my file. Then we sort of go to simply reporting of events, right? We don't - we don't have the kind of emotion that we have earlier, right? "They made me write a statement. I wrote three pages. They phoned in the evening and put me in jail in the prison called 1930." Right? So what do you make of that? I mean, that we - he's just going back to the events.

Amy Shuman 27:45

You know, this was a puzzle to me. And it could be, you know, that I don't know enough about what the difference is between jail and prison, and I had to ask. But - so I'm going to explain now from the questions that I asked. And Charles explained that the jail was really terrible. And being - and - and - and the presidential guard were cruel. And that he was relieved, actually, we get - in the later narrative, much later, so I couldn't read it today. But he's relieved actually, to be taken out of that situation and put in the 1930 prison. It's terrible. And there's lice and all

kinds of bedbugs, and terrible, terrible situation, not enough food, not enough bathrooms, you know, waiting - and that's another kinds of waiting. They time their days, the prisoners by waiting for hours to use the two latrines that, you know, thousands of people are lining up for. So there's this - this return to action, just the action here is a kind of, just, let down of the suspense is over. And now we're going to go to a different place, to the 1930 prison, which in my universe might be worse. Prison. But in his universe, if you know the context, jail was worse and those - the presidential guard was worse.

Jim Phelan 29:15

Yeah. Okay. One last thing I want to ask you about this before we move on to the next one is the, "They made me write a statement. I wrote three pages." Right? There's a kind of interesting -

Amy Shuman 29:26 .

Specificity.

Jim Phelan 29:27

Yeah, there, that he knows, but we don't get content. Right? You know, it's a kind of a gap that opens up--what, what did you write? You know.

Amy Shuman 29:34

Or is that a long or is that a short statement? Right? We know that he's a very educated - by this time in his book, we know that he's very educated. And that - that he's been very well educated his whole life. So he benefits from being an erudite person. So we could then probably infer that.

Jim Phelan 29:56

Right. Well, the one thing that we get is that it didn't matter, right?

Amy. Shuman 29:59

No, that's right. "I wrote three pages" doesn't matter.

Jim Phelan 30:01

"I wrote three pages, I'm going to jail," you know.

Amy Shuman 30:04

Who knows where that - those three pages are. Right. They might be in an archive somewhere, actually, I'd like to ask him that.

Jim Phelan 30:10

Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Yeah. Okay. Anything else on this one before we - you know, I mean, just to maybe come back to the idea of the waiting, right, so we have the - we have the waiting, we have the, "All right, now I want to be arrested," that we get the story of that. And then we

sort of end with him going into the prison, where we know that more waiting will, you know, that the next phase of the narrative is more waiting,

Amy Shuman 30:41

Right. Yeah, I think we can return to the questions that we've just raised later, after we talk about the next part. But we want to think what we've learned about what a waiting narrative looks like.

Jim Phelan 30:52

Okay, excellent. All right. So let's go ahead and, why don't you read the, "Waiting to be Released from Prison."

Amy Shuman 30:58

It had been more than a week since almost all the prisoners had been released. (This is over a year later.) So--it had been more than a week since all the prisoners had been released. However, I was still in prison without any explanation from the relevant authority. Every day that passed, I was concerned about the reasons behind this delay. Was it a simple bureaucracy delay or something else that I did not know about? In either case, I was in no position to know what was going on. In the meantime, I was going through a very unbearable situation, once I realized that almost all my prison companions had been released, and I was left behind with a few comrades. Also, after the mass release of our friends, the prison's administration transferred a good number of non-political prisoners from their quarters to fill in the empty political prisoners' dormitories where we were housed. After my fiancée, Alphonsine, realized that most prisoners had been released and that I was still in prison despite the general release order, she decided to go and confront the General Prosecutor, who was in charge of releasing the prisoners. She told his assistant that she wanted an appointment to meet the General Prosecutor. The day of the appointment, she was quickly invited into the General Prosecutor's office to meet him. Once inside the office, the General Prosecutor asked her the reason she had requested his assistant to see him. Alphonsine explained to him that I had been in prison since October 1990. She reminded him that I'd never been convicted of any crime. She added that it had been almost two weeks since other prisoners had been released on daily - on daily basis, pursuant to the N'sele Peace Agreement. She was wondering why I had not been released. Without looking at her face, he replied that she should just wait until the decision would be made to let me go home. His attitude and his body language, as well as his answer, made Alphonsine very uncomfortable. She fired back and told him the following: "I want to remind you that we are also human beings, and we have feelings just like you." The General Prosecutor was taken aback by these words. He did not expect these strong words to come from a young, short, skinny, very beautiful, but very determined, young girl. He looked like somebody who was just waking up from a deep sleep. After a deep breath, he called his staff and asked them the status of my file. After a while, his staff office called him back and they talked for a little while. After their conversation, he looked at Alphonsine's face and told her that she should not worry, and that he would send his man to her very soon. After this exchange, Alphonsine thanked him and left the office. Less than a week later, Alphonsine's gamble clearly paid off. Indeed, on Monday, April 8, 1991, around 5 pm, the announcer called a number of names of

individuals to be released that day. Fortunately, my name was on that list. Frankly, I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing around me. It was overwhelming. I gave my prison suit and other personal items to my fellow prisoners who were staying behind. After we left our dormitories we were assembled in the prison's hall before we were led to the main office. I remember we were between five and eight people. After we completed some required formalities and signed a lot of paperwork, we were given a document called *billet d'élargissement*. This is a document proving that we had been officially released from prison.

Jim Phelan 35:03

Okay. All right. So just to start things off a little bit. This one has some striking similarities and some striking differences, right. And we begin with another period of waiting, right, and here, there, the waiting is - the, kind of, the instability has to do with the fact that he's still waiting while others are being released. And then we have, you know, the two - middle part of it, where we have the story of Alphonsine making the case for him, and then we return to him at the end, and at the end, we also have the resolution in terms of the release. And here, I think, a lot of emotion being expressed, you know, unlike at the very end of the "Waiting to be Arrested" one. So with that sort of general idea in mind, what do you want to what do you want to - what do you want to home in on?

Amy Shuman 36:02

Well, I think it's - it's here, very - exactly what you're talking, but I think it's very interesting to see how this waiting narrative moves back and forth between action, and there's not very much action when you're waiting, and emotion. And the - the action is often things that are not happening. So that is - so we have descriptions of what doesn't happen, not being released, watching other people be released, being worried about the reasons for the delay. And then - and then we have other - other comments that are specific to time: "It had been more than a week," it starts off, "it had been more than a week." So, why a week, you know, why - we - you know, we're wondering, why is that so important? But then I think what it does is it accentuates the distress and worry that maybe he won't be released.

Jim Phelan 37:06

Right. Right. Right. Yes. And then, something like, "Every day that passed by, I was concerned about the reasons behind that." It's very similar to what we were getting in the first half of the - the previous narrative, right about, well, this is what the day is like, right, or, you know, what Genette - again, what Genette calls the iterative. This thing happens many times, I'm going to tell it once. Yeah. And then also here, he is very upfront about his - the emotional thing, "I was going through a very unbearable situation." Right. And then the relationship of that to, you know, what we were talking about before a little bit, in terms of what you know and what you don't know, right? "I was in no position to know what was going on."

Amy Shuman 37:49

Exactly. I think the key here is what you don't know. And I should tell everyone who's listening that I - the part that I left out of this is a very detailed description of his bodily difficulties, of terrible things that had happened to him. And I decided that there was - it wasn't warranted in

this podcast. We could talk about that more if you'd like. But I decided that it wasn't warranted to disclose those or describe those. So I'm just telling you that they're there. Because they're part of waiting. So, waiting in a state of malnutrition and pain is part of it. But - but - but you're right, I think that the key here is who knows what, and that's why we have to shift to Alphonsine in this narrative, because otherwise, all we have is "I didn't get released, I didn't get released. I had no idea why - "

Jim Phelan 38:49

"I was in no position," right.

Amy Shuman 38:50

"I was in no position. I got released."

Jim Phelan 38:52

Right. Right. Great. Okay. And then in that - what's - what's really striking to me, anyway, is that in the first paragraph there, "I was in no position," he's very much, you know, reconstructing his perspective at the time of the action, right?

Amy Shuman 39:08

That's right.

Jim Phelan 39:09

And then when we get Alphonsine, and we realize, well, this is his version of Alphonsine, he's - he's gotta be speaking from, you know, knowledge that he has acquired from her, presumably, somehow, right? And - and it's almost like, in these two paragraphs, we have a whole different kind of narration, right? We have, like, a kind of omniscient narrator with, you know, authority, the privilege to give inside views, not - not only of Alphonsine, but also of, you know, the guard, right? The prosecutor general. It's really quite remarkable. And so, you know, the questions of - obviously, questions of knowledge, but also the questions of when does he know and then, you know, how does that come through in the - in the telling, right?

Amy Shuman 40:03

And how he positions Alphonsine. You know, without Alphonsine, he might not have been freed then.

Jim Phelan 40:09

Absolutely.

Amy Shuman 40:10

Right? And so - and Alphonsine, who is now his wife of many years, is the rescuer. And -

Jim Phelan 40:17

That's where the action comes, in the waiting to be released. He's waiting and she's acting.

Amy Shuman 40:21

She's acting. Right, right. What's interesting here, also something I want to bring up from later in the narrative, it's too much later for me to have connected it, but after he gets released, he's in terrible physical shape, and so a lot of it is about being able to eat or not or sleeping and not. But then it's about telling the story. Everyone wants to hear what happened to him. And he tells it for weeks, weeks and weeks and weeks of everyone needing to hear the story over and over again. And he tells it and tells it until everyone has heard it. And so there's this sense of duration and exhaustion, and saturation, really. So the saturation of knowledge that people - of knowledge that people want later, is fascinating in relation to this absolute lack of knowledge at this point.

Jim Phelan 41:14

Yeah. Okay. Great. Okay. Interesting. Yeah. Yeah. So there's a couple other things in the - in the, you know, narration of Alphonsine's action that kind of stand out. So the whole thing about looking, right, so, "Without looking at her face, the General Prosecutor replied, she should just wait," right? And then the relationship between that, and then her direct speech. So we get a summary of what he says, and then we get her - her actual words.

Amy Shuman 41:54

Her actual words, "I want to remind you," and then it's not just words, it's a proclamation. So we have Alphonsine making a proclamation. And it isn't even that dramatic a proclamation. I mean, we - we, the listener, don't need to be convinced of this. It's a - it's an obvious proclamation. "We are human beings." I mean, and we're maybe at the moment, surprised that this - that this General Prosecutor would be persuaded by that, but in the narrative, he is, right, so he's taken aback by these words. And he's taken aback by - by - by these strong words that come from a young, short, skinny, very beautiful, but very determined young girl. So she's being positioned as this completely powerless person who speaks these truths that are very important to Charles, right? These are the truths that set him free. And she is the one to say them. And he is taken aback, which is an interesting positioning.

Jim Phelan 42:59

Right. Right. And it tells us a lot about the occasion, right, that - that this is a bold thing for her to say, you know, and he later calls - talks about it as a gamble. Because, you know, maybe the other, you know, response would be, well, he's not getting out of here. He, you know, he's connected to you, you - this impertinent, you know, woman. Right. Yeah. So - but again - again, I think it's very effective that we get - we get her voice. And then we also get the, you know, the narration of how he responded, this kind of internal vocalization from the General Prosecutor, which, epistemologically really we don't -

Amy Shuman 43:39

Well, and we also have - Alphonsine has to be the one who says, to herself, "He looked like somebody who was just waking up from a deep sleep." And that follows the description of her, which is not her sense of herself. It's the prosecutor's sense of her, right? So we have the

prosecutor seeing her as this skinny, beautiful, young, short, girl - girl. And she's a girl, right? She's very young. And then we -

Jim Phelan 44:06

It's the prosecutor, and it's also - I mean, the other thing, I think, you know, technically, right. But it's also Charles who's describing her this way, right? I mean, you know, that he's trying to highlight what it was like for the prosecutor to hear this from Alphonsine. Right. So, yeah.

Amy Shuman 44:28

I didn't get a chance to ask Charles this, before sending - before I sent it to you, but I think that - that when he says, "He would send -" I think it should be, "He would send *her* man to her very soon."

Jim Phelan 44:42

Okay. Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

Amy Shuman 44:44

So I need to ask Charles, because we often have - between the French and the English, we get caught up in some of our pronouns. Yeah.

Jim Phelan 44:52

Yeah. I mean, there is a sort of logic for it to be -

Amy Shuman 44:54

It's probably "her man," right?

Jim Phelan 44:56

Yeah, that's what I was thinking. But then the other thing that - sort of started with this is, right, at the beginning, we have, "Without looking at her face," and then after their conversation, "He looked at Alphonsine's face," right? So this is another sort of consequence of the - we can see the force of her declaration.

Amy Shuman 45:15

Right. And we wonder about how he heard this from her, right? Because this is presented, not as Alphonsine saying it, but as him knowing it.

Jim Phelan 45:27

Right, right, it's back to the omniscient.

Amy Shuman 45:29

Right. Right, something he knows today.

Jim Phelan 45:32

Right. Right. Or he's, you know -

Amy Shuman 45:36

He learned it once he got out.

Jim Phelan 45:38

Yeah, or he even - he's - he's saying, "It must have been this way," right?

Amy Shuman 45:43

That's right, "It must have been this way." If you imagine the General Prosecutor, and you imagine this young girl, this is what it must have been like. Right. Right.

Jim Phelan 45:50

Right. But I think what's interesting about that, is that it doesn't affect - I mean, we get that, you know, I think when you first read it, you just take it, right? But then you can start to interrogate it, and then you say, well, wait a minute, how does he know and so on. But it doesn't - I don't think it finally influences the idea that, you know, this is - this is referential, right, that he's making - he's telling his story and Alphonsine's role in his story.

Amy Shuman 46:18

Right. That's what - it's about positioning, and that's - that's what interests me, is the way that - or I said earlier on, I call it footing. So, I think - I think the footing is very important for the story to be tellable in the present. So in the present, it's very important that Alphonsine be the rescuer. It's very important that this General Prosecutor be called to his senses, and that the rescue occur because she's willing to say this bold statement. All of that is the kind of positioning that sets - that, that states the truth when there's been so much falsehood, because as she says, remember, we have her saying also, that - that he didn't commit a crime.

Jim Phelan 47:10

Yes. Right. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Amy Shuman 47:14

"She reminded him that I have never been convicted of any crime." Right? So that's her - I think it's - I think that's about - that's not about the information. We already know that, right? We know that from earlier in the story. That's about the - setting things straight. Changing the footing, so that Charles leaves prison as somebody who was wrongly put there, and - and is set to go forward with things somewhat set straight.

Jim Phelan 47:48

Right. Now, is there - can you say - can you shed any light on the fact that, you know, the General Prosecutor actually agreed to see her, right, or that, you know, Alphonsine says, you know, "I don't want to see the assistant," basically, "I want to see the General Prosecutor," and he agrees. Is there any kind of -

Amy Shuman 48:06

Yeah, I don't know enough about - I could ask Charles, but I don't know enough about the bureaucracy. My guess - it's just a guess, is that it's a matter of status, that she's a woman of enough status to do that. She's also an educated woman. So my - that's my guess.

Jim Phelan 48:22

Okay. Yeah. Yeah, well that makes sense. Okay, well, then, maybe let's look at the end again, and I mentioned before about - there's an interesting, I think, contrast between the kind of, you know, expression of emotion that we get here, as opposed to the end of the "Waiting to be Arrested" narrative. So, "Fortunately, my name was on that list. Frankly, I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing around me. It was overwhelming. I gave my prison suit and other personal items to my fellow prisoners who were staying behind." I think all those sentences are

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Amy Shuman 49:10

Yeah, I think - well, I think what we have there is another kind of emotion that we haven't had - well, maybe - you could argue that we've had it before. But I think that this iteration of the things that happened is ritualistic. So this is the ritualistic parting from the prison. And that's why we have the giving of the specific - specificity of giving things to the other prisoners, whereas being beaten in jail was not ritualized. That's not a ritualistic. Some of the earlier part in the narrative is. You know, "Who is Charles Rutenesha?" That's a ritualized performance of the arrest, which he also is then describing in that ritualized way, and that's why we get some of these general statements, "You would this, you would that." I think we're looking at - we think we're hearing details, but we're actually hearing ritualized behavior -

Jim Phelan 50:08

Being carried out. Yeah.

Amy Shuman 50:09

And - and then some of the time we get this interruption of the ritual with the - with the deeply personal. So here, "I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing around me it was overwhelming." My sense of that is Charles really doesn't have any more words for that. And that when we talk about waiting, and narratives of waiting, there really are things that are hard to narrate. And so the only way to narrate them can be the minute, day after day, this is what we did. But that doesn't get to the emotion. And it's difficult to convey, I think, in words, the narrative of - of waiting, being released, finally going out. The narrative goes on quite a bit after this. But it's - but even in the parts after this, that we're not reading today, a lot of it keeps going back to detail, because it's so hard to narrate. The overwhelming sense, the only - the one thing I could point to that is somewhat emotional is that he wasn't able to sleep in a bed for a long time. Had to sleep on the floor. And - and he's a person of means. This isn't a person who was accustomed to sleeping on the floor before he went to prison. So the - the - the feeling of - of not being quite human. How do you narrate, not being - feeling like you have been treated as inhuman, not human, not feeling like you are human. Having day to day survival, which is not even only just getting food, but really day to day, minute to minute survival as the only narratable experience, because how do you narrate not being human?

Jim Phelan 52:02

Okay, yeah, yeah, no, that's good. And I think maybe, you know, what I'm reacting to is the fact that there is this expression of - of emotion, but you're, I think, nicely pointing out that it's not, you know -

Amy Shuman 52:15

It's not very elaborate.

Jim Phelan 52:16

It's not very elaborate. It's general, right, "I can't believe it."

Amy Shuman 52:19

It's not "I cried." It's not "I went to my knees." It's not, you know - none of the things that might be showing us the deep emotion. It's about complete disassociation, in a way, right? "It was overwhelming. I - I couldn't believe - "I think when he says, "I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing around me," I think that's pretty literal. Right? That's not just in - general -

Jim Phelan 52:47

Hyperbole, kind of thing.

Amy Shuman 52:48

Right.

Jim Phelan 52:49

Right. Right. Yeah. Good. Yeah. And then I think one of the last things I want to get to is the way in which we end in the present tense, right? So, "This is a document proving that we had been officially released from prison." Right? And, you know, that - so there's this kind of jump from the time of the action to the time of the telling and that - and that tension -

Amy Shuman 53:17

That's right.

Jim Phelan 53:18

Which is kind of interesting, I think. It's almost like a kind of reaffirmation of -

Amy Shuman 53:24

It's also stepping outside the narrative. So it's like a coda. So it's really speaking to us. It's even maybe speaking to me since I was the listener, right, saying, I'm telling you, you know, this is what - this is what that document is, in the present, I'm speaking. So I think that shift to the present at that moment is also interactive. And it's a shift in speaking to me. Because there's the interactive dimension of all of this, that we have to imagine all the time. It's a very interactive text, you know, where we have all of the players, you know, him and his - and the people who are going to maybe arrest him and - and Alphonse, and the prosecutor. So we

have the interaction within the text. But also, I think Charles is speaking to us and speaking maybe, to - to others through me.

Jim Phelan 54:13

To you - you as a stand-in.

Amy Shuman. 54:17

Right. And his audience is probably not - I'm not Rwandan, for those who are listening - it's probably more Rwandans and other people who've experienced what he's experienced or people who want to know about it. And *then* people like me, so I think there's a closer audience, and I'm the vehicle to it.

Jim Phelan 54:35

Okay. Yeah, that's helpful too, right. Okay, terrific. Anything - final comments?

Amy Shuman 54:44

Well, I'll just say - I just want to refer back to what I said at the very beginning, which is that this kind of narrative, the narrative of waiting, is very different than narratives of flight, escape, and capture, and that, you know, to return to that - there only being two kinds of narratives, the - the journey - the journey or the stranger comes to town, I think there are other chronotopes, that is, other narratives that have a complex relationship of - of space and time, that are genres that we recognize and that the templates then come in part, as false as they often are, they come from that recognition of the genre.

Jim Phelan 55:26

Yeah, yeah. Great. Okay. Excellent. Well, thank you so much, Amy, this was really enlightening, I think, and hope you enjoyed it.

Amy Shuman 55:34

Thank you. I loved your comments.

Jim Phelan 55:37

Good. Okay, well, I want to thank everyone for listening. And to say that we welcome feedback to the Project Narrative Twitter account, which is @pnOhioState. Also feedback to our email address projectnarrative@osu.edu, or to our Project Narrative Facebook page. I also want to invite you to our March - March podcast, featuring our colleague Karen Winstead, who will be discussing a narrative yet to be determined. Thank you all.