

September 2023 Project narrative

[00:00:00] **Jim phelan:** 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 Susan Lanser, who has selected a story by Sayed Kashua.

[00:00:22] “Herzl Disappears at Midnight.” Susan Lanser is Professor Emerita in three departments at Brandeis University. English, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Comparative Literature. Sue has done groundbreaking and influential work in multiple fields, narrative theory in the novel, with particular interest in women writers, 18th century European studies, and gender and sexuality studies.

[00:00:50] In narrative theory, Sue and Robyn Warhol were the scholars of the 1980s. who launched what is now one of the most important post classical approaches to narrative feminist narratology. Sue's influential books include *The Narrative Act*, 1981, *Fictions of Authority*, 1992, and *The Sexuality of History*, 2014.

[00:01:14] In addition, Sue and Robyn Warhol co edited *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* in 2015. Among Sue's numerous awards are the Joan Kelly Prize from the American History Association for the best book in women's history slash feminist theory for the sexuality of history, and Sue's also the winner of the Wayne C.

[00:01:41] Booth Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for the Study of Narrative. Sue is currently working on several projects, including one on narratives of Jerusalem. which has led her to choose Kashua's, “Herzl Disappears at Midnight,” for today's podcast. Sue is collaborating on this project with Shlomith Rimmon Kenan, Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University in Israel.

[00:02:06] Sue and Shlomith have published three essays from this project, including an excellent one in *Narrative* in 2019, “Narratology at the Checkpoint, The Poetics and Politics of Entanglement.” So welcome, Sue, and, uh, perhaps you could begin by saying a few things about Kashua, as well as whatever else you think our listeners should hear before you read this story.

[00:02:30] **Susan:** Thank you so much, Jim, and thank you for having me, um, on the podcast. Um, this is a story written in Hebrew by a Palestinian citizen of Israel. Uh, and Sayed Kashua is really only the third or fourth Israeli Arab who has chosen to write in Hebrew rather than Arabic, which is a somewhat controversial, uh, choice.

[00:02:51] His mother tongue is Arabic. Um, but over the past two decades, Sayed Kashua has become one of the most famous of Israeli writers and in three different modalities. He's an award winning novelist whose name almost always appears on lists of Israel's top writers. He's an award winning screenwriter whose innovative bilingual sitcom, Arab Labor, took Israel by storm.

[00:03:17] And he was for many years, an avidly read weekly columnist for the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. All of his work gives ironic turn, sometimes hilarious, sometimes heartbreaking, to the situation of Palestinian Israelis and their relationship to the dominant Jewish society. As far as I know, however, the story I'm about to read is the only work of short fiction among Kashua's creative works.

[00:03:46] It was published in 2005 in the journal Haaretz. It was written originally in Hebrew, and I'm reading it here in a translation that I co created with my colleague Shlomith Rimmon Kenan, and that also draws on a prior translation by Vivian Eden.

[00:04:09] **Susan:** The text's narratee, or the implied reader here, would know that the story is set in Jerusalem and would recognize the allusions. So you will hear references to streets and neighborhoods in both predominantly Jewish West Jerusalem and predominantly Palestinian East Jerusalem, and also the shared space of the walled Old City that West and East Jerusalemites usually enter through different gates.

[00:04:39] In the West, you'll hear of Uzishkin Street, Rashba Street, the Jaffa Gate in the East. The dominant pointer is to the Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, just north of the Old City, which you reach through the Damascus Gate. The main point here is that we have two Jerusalems, respectively Jewish and Palestinian.

[00:05:03] You'll also hear references to political groups. On the Israeli side, Ta'ayyush, a grassroots Israeli and Palestinian cooperative organization, and the Association for Civil Rights, a long time and broadly focused Israeli NGO. Two Palestinian political parties are also mentioned Hamas, the Islamic Party, probably known to all of you and its rival party, the Marxist PFLP,

[00:05:31] or popular front for the liberation of Palestine. And I think that's enough to get us

[00:05:36] **Jim phelan:** going. Yes, that's great. Thanks very much. So now, here's Sue Lanser reading Sayed Kashua's "Herzl Disappears at Midnight."

[00:05:48] **Susan:** Herzl Haliba lets out a cry and jerks his head from the pillow in alarm. He recovers very quickly. This is not the first time after all. And calms down, breathing lightly, trying to still his pounding heart so the body stirring beside him will settle back into a deep early morning sleep.

[00:06:10] After making sure the person, Anna von-something, he does not remember now, has drifted back into slumber, he rises very slowly from the bed, pulling on his trousers as if he were slipping his legs into tights. First the right leg, slowly, patiently, noiselessly. Then the left leg, holding the metal buckle of his belt so it won't clang, leaving his trousers open.

[00:06:36] He puts on his shirt, picks up his shoes, tiptoes to the door, pulling the handle slowly, takes a last look at what's her name, the really pretty German volunteer. And leaves the room. It is still early and as he'd expected, the hostel's corridor is empty. When he's at a safe distance from the room where he spent the night, he puts on his shoes, zips his trousers, buttons his shirt, and goes down into the lobby.

[00:07:04] The desk clerk is the same one he met a few hours earlier when he arrived with the fun something. He walks past the clerk who smiles widely and greets him in English. Good morning, sir. Nothing in the clerk's behavior recalls the hostility with which he'd greeted Khalifa when he arrived. Then the clerk had addressed him in Arabic, looked at him with suspicion, and insisted that he pay for the night in advance.

[00:07:30] He doesn't recognize him now, thinks he's a lodger or maybe a tourist, and this does not surprise Khalifa. Good morning to you too, he replies in English, swallowing the words to hide his accent. and walks out of the hostel for the narrow lanes of the old city. The sun has just begun to rise and the light outside is still bluish.

[00:07:54] A chill grips him and he shivers. He rubs his hands together and walks quickly, trying to recall the shortest way out of this place that has started to feel threatening. He has no idea where he is going. Last night he'd been the experienced local who led the German tourist. From the pub in Sheikh Jarrah to her hostel in the Old City.

[00:08:18] He takes a chance, reminding himself that he should head west, away from the sunrise, and that the wider lanes are safer. It's Friday and still early, but the sounds of morning reach his ears from courtyards hidden behind antique doors. The throat clearing of smokers, crying babies flushing toilets. He quickens his pace.

[00:08:40] He has to get out of here before he's noticed. He tries in vain to summon even a bit of the confidence he must have felt when he came in here. Now he hesitates and decides to turn right. He's almost running. Some of the shops are open and he passes them without a glance. They are mostly bakeries and their strong fragrance hits his nostrils.

[00:09:02] How he longs for pita with za'atar now. Noises come from behind him. He looks back nervously and discovers a group of yeshiva boys in black, walking fast, but not as fast as he is. He has to get away from them. In the end, who would be a more convenient target? He doesn't want to get hurt. He sees the exit from the Old City.

[00:09:24] He doesn't want to run, that would just arouse suspicion. But he walks fast, hoping that the exit ahead of him is the Jaffa Gate. In any case, he will hurry to that wide gate, that opening out of here. Relieved now, he walks slowly, comfortably, knowing that the border guards are there behind him. He is the only person leaving the old city at such an hour, whom the police don't even think to stop for an ID.

[00:09:54] Now he can try to remember last night's conquest. He pulls his pack of cigarettes from his pants pocket and lights up. The morning's first drag fills his lungs. He smiles with pleasure, even though now he really can't stand the taste of those Imperials. How happy he is to walk down Uzishkin, his street.

[00:10:13] The weekend paper will surely await him at the entrance to his flat. He takes the steps to the second floor, two at a time, and then stops dead in his tracks. There sits Noga, leaning against the apartment door. She looks at him, her eyes red and swollen. All the joy in his heart dissipates instantly. Hi, he says, leaning down to stroke her hair, but she pushes his hand away angrily.

[00:10:43] Don't touch me, you son of a whore, she says, and gets up. Hey, he says again tenderly, I can explain. She's certainly been sitting there the whole night, just waiting to prove something. And now she gets up and leaves, crying, muttering, Son of a whore, son of a whore. He runs down the stairs after her, trying to grab her arm, but she shoves him away.

[00:11:04] Hey, Noga, you know that I love you, he says. And she runs out of the building. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He really loves her, only her. They've already been together for two years. They met as interns in a law firm, and all the staff, especially the secretaries, knew from the first moment that they were meant for one another.

[00:11:27] And it's true, he can't give her up. He'd do anything for her. He runs after her to the car, insisting that he loves her. Yeah, son of a whore, she says as she gets into the car. Can you tell me where you've been till now? Beliva is silent. She locks the car door and drives away. He'll have to tell her the truth.

[00:11:49] After two years together, the time has come for her to know. But is there a chance that she'll believe him? He gets into bed, feeling dizzy. That was a lot of Arak that he drank last night, and before that he'd shared a bottle of wine at dinner with Noga. He shouldn't have mixed them, he knows. But after midnight, he can't drink anything but Arak.

[00:12:11] A splitting headache hits him now. He knows he won't be able to sleep a wink. So what exactly will he say? What will he tell her? Of course the truth, and nothing but the truth. But just where can he begin? Perhaps at the end, that in fact, he turns into an Arab after midnight, exactly like Cinderella. Well, not exactly, but the point is clear.

[00:12:35] It's true, and Noga will believe the story immediately, since she is completely gullible. Or maybe from the very beginning, from that Rosh Hashanah 30 odd years ago when he was born. Maybe even the previous Rosh Hashanah, the one before the war. He'll begin with his mother, that pious, childless woman, about 40 then, and hoping for a child.

[00:12:59] And when she prayed at the Western Wall, she begged God for a child, even if it were born half Arab. What will he tell Noga? That his mother's prayers were answered to the letter? That he becomes an Arab every night? How likely is it that she'll believe him? And if she believes, how likely is it that she'll continue to love him once she knows?

[00:13:22] After all, he's concealed this thing from her because he loves her so much, and he's afraid that she will leave him once she knows. At midnight, he changes completely. He cannot explain it. You have to be there to understand, but he is sure that at midnight, he becomes another person with different feelings, different fears, and different hopes.

[00:13:46] The only obvious change is the language. From midnight to dawn, he knows hardly a word of Hebrew, except for okay, shekel, and checkpoint, because the Arabs also used these words as if they were their own. There's a cruel buzzing in his ears. Every five minutes, he calls Noga's phone, knowing in advance that he won't get an answer.

[00:14:08] He'll have to go to her place. But what will he say? How will he answer her simple question? Can you tell me where you were all night? After all, they've been dating for two years, and he's never spent the night with her. For two years, they have been together all day, madly in love, but he always finds a pretext to escape, to flee, to disappear before midnight.

[00:14:34] He will certainly not tell her that he spent the night in the company of a pro Palestinian German tourist whose name he's already forgotten. He will not tell her what usually happens when he becomes an Arab and meets his friends from the movement to plan demonstrations and actions against the occupation.

[00:14:50] True, during these hours between midnight and dawn, his greatest desire is to meet an Arab girl. And during these hours he completely forgets his love for Noga. But Arab girls aren't out after midnight. And in the few cases where anything has happened, he's had to be satisfied with these European volunteers who are turned on by his politics.

[00:15:13] He does not become just an Arab. But a proud nationalist who refuses to spend time in West Jerusalem because he's unwilling to tolerate humiliation and discrimination. Although nothing external changes in him at midnight, he knows well that he turns into a different person. They can see it, he's convinced.

[00:15:33] More than once, the border police have stopped Uzishkin Street before dawn. It is something else, perhaps a smell, maybe fear. He himself feels that between midnight and dawn, more eyes are fixed on him. He feels their looks of hate, and he gets paranoid. But he loves Noga. There's no way to compare her with those insignificant foreigners who cross his path once every few months.

[00:16:03] He's not willing to give her up, not now. He has to tell her. Surely she'll understand. He tries to call her once again, in vain. In the evening, he walks to her house. Her flatmate opens the door. Noga is lying face down on her bed, her head buried in the pillow with the blanket over it, Leonard Cohen singing loudly.

[00:16:27] Khalifa turns the music down a bit and sits beside her on the bed. She pulls the blanket even more tightly around her head. The time has come for you to hear the truth, he says, stroking the blanket where he thinks her head must be. Listen, he begins. First of all, I want you to know that I love you, only you, and I came to give you the explanation you deserve.

[00:16:52] I know this will sound incredible, but I am actually half Arab. In saying these last words, he sees her body shaking and he guesses that he has made her laugh. How he loves her, recalling now how his sense of humor has always drawn her to him. How she hasn't given up, even though they've not spent even one full night together in two years.

[00:17:15] He tells her about the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, about his mother and her prayers. He tells her about his childhood, about the nights when he woke up terrified, feeling something different, knowing that he had dreamt in another language which he understood at night and forgot completely in the morning.

[00:17:35] He tells her how his mother explained away his feelings, sold him various strange stories. Took him to rabbis, witch doctors, and even Arab clerics to expunge the evil eye. Nothing helped. Dreams of expulsion, war, living as a refugee. Dreams whose origins he didn't know. As he talks, Noga begins to relax her hold on the blanket and gives the impression that she is listening.

[00:18:03] From time to time she laughs and blows her nose. But her face is still in the pillow and her head is covered. He tells her how his mother always made him go to bed on time and not get up before sunrise. How she wouldn't let him go to summer camp with the other children in the neighborhood. How she always kept him from going on the annual class trips.

[00:18:23] And how she prevented him, as an only son and an orphan, from entering the army, even though he longed to join a combat unit. Noga turns in bed, takes the blanket off her head, and puts her pillows back in place. Her eyes are red and swollen. She lowers her face, takes a tissue, and blows her nose. The story has entertained her.

[00:18:47] She sees it as a way to flatter her and ask forgiveness. She knows this manner of Herzl's, and she hates herself for always letting his tricks work on her. So you don't grow a mustache at night, she asks, laughing. No, he says, the changes are internal. When I was small, I did notice one thing on those nights when I would get up to pee.

[00:19:10] I felt that it got heavier down there, a little bigger than what I was used to in the daytime. Now Noga laughs out loud. Her laughter only gets stronger when she looks at Herzl's face and sees that he seems to be serious. I knew you wouldn't believe me, he said. But if you want me to be with you, you have to believe.

[00:19:31] Tonight I'll stay with you, he sings off key. Okay, Ahmed, she says, and laughs aloud again. Noga is already getting tired of this game. She asks him to stop. They're finally spending a night together, and he insists on this idiotic game. Herzl does not understand a word of what she says, and asks to speak in English.

[00:19:56] But Noga feels a bit ridiculous and does not want to play the game. Herzl promises her in English to take her to his night spots. She gets dressed up and they walk from Rashba Street, named for one of those medieval Spanish poets, to Gaza Road, and wait at the bus stop for a cab. When the first taxi stops, Herzl puts his head in the window and tells the driver in English, No thanks.

[00:20:23] Noga does not understand and he explains that this taxi company refuses to hire Arab drivers. So he is boycotting them. He ends with a curse in English against fascists who hate humanity. Herzl feels really embarrassed to be bringing with him a Jewish Israeli girl. Sometimes girls from the leftist group Taiyush come to the pub, but he dislikes them.

[00:20:48] He feels those activists care mainly about Israeli issues and don't have pure motives. There's no choice, he'll have to introduce her as a lawyer from the Association for Civil Rights. Noga nods when he proposes this cover story and asks again for him to stop already. Although somewhere inside her, she feels that this might be his way of proposing.

[00:21:11] She's sure it will happen tonight. Surely last night was also part of the game. What can she do? Herzl has always been a little strange. When he pushes open the front door of the pub, she is sure that all their friends will be waiting there to shout, Surprise! But nothing happens. She walks behind the man who starts to speak Arabic as if he'd learned it at his mother's breast.

[00:21:37] He greets people left and right, shaking hands and heading to his usual table. He kisses and hugs a few young people who look completely Arab, and she watches him. Something in him really has changed. Though nothing has changed about his looks, still, everything has changed. She feels lost in a conversation that becomes more and more heated.

[00:22:01] In a language she does not understand. From time to time, she hears ghaza or ghamala. She looks at her lover, tries to remember who he was an hour earlier, watches him drink arak and smoke cigarettes, which she is seeing for the first time. He doesn't look at her at all, blatantly ignores her, and when their eyes meet accidentally, she feels that his, his expressed suspicion and reluctance.

[00:22:29] She doesn't want to stay there for even one more minute. But she doesn't dare interrupt the conversation. Who knows what the response might be. They don't stay long, perhaps an hour and a half. He takes leave of his friends with hugs and kisses, and they go out to find a taxi in Sheikh Jarrah. They do not speak the whole way to his apartment.

[00:22:51] The neighbor's dog is barking hysterically, and Herzl curses it in Arabic. He takes his key ring and opens a locked cupboard filled with books in Arabic, selects one, and starts to read. So, asks Noga in English this time, her voice trembling a little. Are you from Hamas or something? How dare you, he almost scolds her, insulted.

[00:23:16] Popular front, he answers. He reads the book until he falls asleep. Noga stays on the sofa at a safe distance. She doesn't close her eyes all night, just watches him as he sleeps. Even asleep, he's not the same. He wakes up terrified at sunrise, looks around to make sure he's in safe surroundings. He sees Noga watching him with a loving look.

[00:23:42] He smiles at her. Good morning, darling, he says. She looks fairly relaxed. This is the man she knows well. So, she asks, smiling, What, sweetie? What's going to happen with this whole Arab story? she asks. As far as I'm concerned, he says on his way to the bathroom, let them all burn.

[00:24:09] **Jim phelan:** great, so thanks very much.

[00:24:11] Um, so I think the story gives us a lot to talk about, and maybe we could just start with that title. Um, you know, what kind of signals does that “Herzl disappears at midnight” sort of send to us as we begin reading or listening?

[00:24:30] **Susan:** Um, well, we could start with the name Herzl or Herzl, um, as you probably know, the 19th century visionary architect of Zionism was Theodor Herzl, and he is widely considered to be the founding father of the Zionist movement.

[00:24:46] So Herzl has now become a common Hebrew first name, but that name obviously, you know, blatantly evokes the Jewish world of Israel. Um, and then the title also carries the most important fact of the novel, though in a rather elliptical form, which is Herzl's disappearance at midnight. Yeah.

[00:25:09] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, in a way, we get a sentence as a title, right, for a short story, which is, you know, fairly atypical.

[00:25:15] I mean, you know, we think of famous short stories, we think of Araby or Indian Camp or, you know. But here we have a sentence, and it's a sentence in the present tense, and disappears itself is a kind of a, a word that's tricky in terms of, you know, where's the agency? Um, so, you know, any thoughts about any of those aspects of the title?

[00:25:41] **Susan:** Uh, well, one thing that's interesting in the Hebrew, disappeared in the past and disappears in the present are the same word. Okay. Um, so in some ways he disappeared in the past. Tanoga. Yeah. Um, or he, he disappears every night, but it's a continuous present as well. So it really is a kind of a play with, uh, past and present.

[00:26:03] Um, yeah. Um, by the way, I may forget this later. Noga's name in Hebrew means brightness or sunshine or light. So she is the daytime figure. Um, it's also the word for the planet Venus is Noga. Um, so this is, her identity is sort of holy. Uh, in the daytime. Um, and then, you know, the word disappears could have signaled something metaphoric.

[00:26:27] You know, we talk about people disappearing, you know, in their feelings or, you know, disappearing from, but, but, you know, this is a very literal disappearance. And I think the, the signal there is also, um, could be misleading until we get into the story and realize that, wow, he really does become someone else.

[00:26:46] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, right. Um, what about genre? Do you feel like we're getting any Tips the genre with the title or we need to get further into the story?

[00:26:58] **Susan:** Well, you know it I think I'm not sure how much that the title conveys except you know When we say something he disappears at midnight. I think the Cinderella story does get evoked and right course evoked in the story as well.

[00:27:12] Um, and if we don't take it metaphorically, we know we're in some strange, yeah, magical, realist world.

[00:27:19] **Jim phelan:** Right, right. Okay. Yeah. And then, uh, you know, maybe, um, we could think about that too, because there are, you know, once we start reading or you get into it, right, as you said with your, uh, prefatory remarks, right, with this is a recognizable Jerusalem, right, historical Jerusalem, and then we have this.

[00:27:39] It's, you know, magical realist, um, you know, phenomenon sort of at the, at the center of the story. So, um, so do you think magical realism is a kind of good generic handle?

[00:27:54] **Susan:** Well, I think it's useful. I mean, in a way, the story is works on two levels. It's a kind of allegory. Um, you can see Herzl standing in for sort of the Jewish Israeli populace or Israel itself and his nighttime self standing in for Palestinians, Palestine.

[00:28:14] And so it has that allegorical quality, um, but it also is, you know, grounded in a very detailed realist world. Um, you know, Ian Watt's formal realism is everywhere here in these place names and, and details. And so. Then, you know, we could say this is a story that does take a kind of magical swerve. Right.

[00:28:36] Yeah. And then we have to, of course, accept that if we're going to accept that this could possibly be a story in the real world.

[00:28:42] **Jim phelan:** Right. And to the extent that, um, you know, it's more than a given or that the story does something to sort of explain it, right? We get, you know, when Herzl's thinking about what he's going to say to Noga, he talks about, well, should I start with my mother and her prayers and...

[00:29:00] You know, um, so, you know, I mean, I think that's interesting, right, because you could do it just with, okay, this is the given, right, but, but there's that kind of layering of that. Um, so, you know, what do you, what do you make of that?

[00:29:16] **Susan:** Right. So the mother and her prayers is also an allusion, I think, um, a biblical allusion to the story of Hannah.

[00:29:23] the mother of Samuel, and it's the Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur reference. In the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, we read the story of Hannah. Okay. So

that timing is, is, would be known to kind of a typical reader. Reading the Bible is, is not just a religious thing in Israel. It is actually part of the curriculum. So the child in an Israeli school would know this story.

[00:29:49] And, um, Hannah is also barren, and she prays for a son, and says, I will make, I'll give him to the priests. Yeah. Um, so there's a similarity there. So, so that's yet another dimension. Right,

[00:30:01] **Jim phelan:** right. And I think in a way that, yeah, that dimension sort of, um, It's another kind of doubling or it is, it is, you know, magical realism, but yet it's also part of our tradition and, you know, we can, we can recognize that and, and so on.

[00:30:16] Yeah. Yeah. Um, so, uh, you already sort of alluded to the allegorical, um, dimension, right? But there's also the sort of kind of progresses, it's kind of built around, uh, The personal, uh, you know, the relationship between, uh, Herzl and Noga, um, and so part of what I think, you know, what's interesting about the story is the way in which, um, Kashua is trying to work with both, right, the personal and the, and the political or the, the mimetic and the allegorical, um, and that's also would be.

[00:30:52] consistent with the sort of magical realism, um, that we're thinking about,

[00:30:57] **Susan:** right? Yeah, yeah, I think definitely. I mean, in one sense, we have a very canned kind of story about an unfaithful boyfriend. Yeah. Um, and on the other hand, and, and that the relationship on the level of sort of individual. And I think there's a deeper question there too.

[00:31:16] Is Noga going to accept the Palestinian in Herzl? You know, what's going to happen. Yeah, right. And she's clearly at the end of the story, uh, somewhat nervous and relieved when she sees the person she knows, but, um, so, I mean, we can't take it too literally since it is,

[00:31:35] **Jim phelan:** you know, Yeah, and he leaves that unresolved and partly be, I think, because he doesn't want to let the personal overtake the.

[00:31:43] The kind of political or

[00:31:44] **Susan:** something. Yeah, well, he, he leaves it unresolved. I just say that the very last sentence of the story is Herzl himself really denying everything he is at night saying, "let them all burn." And that is a, an

excruciatingly powerful image right now in the wake of the settler violence and places like Juarez.

[00:32:05] So, um, Um, You know, uh, Herzl himself does not want to acknowledge in the daytime the politics of his nighttime self. Right, right, right. I mean, it's a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde story. He's clearly a doppelganger. Yeah, yeah. You know, the nighttime holds these, these hidden realities of Israel Palestine.

[00:32:25] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:32:26] And then maybe a little bit more on that. He does seem, I mean... Bracket the last line for now, but there is evidence that he does, during the day, you know, realize that he has this Arab identity, that he does change, that he has to, you know, he can't say, oh, let's, let's spend the night together because, to Noga, because he knows what's coming and, and all that, um, but, so it's an interesting kind of doppelganger in the, in the sense that one side clearly knows about the other.

[00:33:01] You know, at least periodically, uh, knows about the other. It's not clear that the Arab side knows about the Israeli side.

[00:33:10] **Susan:** Yeah, I mean, there's almost a kind of disavowal on the Arab side, you know, he doesn't want to bring the girl, the Israeli Jewish girlfriend into the, into that Arab space, so there's a way of trying to keep that space sort of, um, not invaded.

[00:33:25] Yeah, yeah,

[00:33:26] **Jim phelan:** yeah, yeah, yeah, and maybe, you know, just talk a little bit about some of the other differences, right? So as, uh, You know, we learned that they met, um, when they were interning at the law firm, so presumably they were, you know, working as lawyers. And then he's this radical, you know, member of the Popular Front.

[00:33:47] Um, with the Arab identity, so that's also a kind of, you know, Jekyll Hyde, maybe, kind of thing. I don't know if that's going too far, but what do you think about that? Yeah, I think

[00:33:57] **Susan:** Jekyll Hyde or two different Jekylls and so forth, because it's not that one is a bad character, you know, an evildoer, but certainly in this one character live these two identities.

[00:34:09] In this one space live these two identities. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

[00:34:13] **Jim phelan:** Okay. Okay. Yeah. Um. So maybe we could talk a little bit more than about, about the way, uh, you know, um, the time and space work in this story, right? So, you know, it's a 24 hour story, you know, something that by 2005 has been done a lot. Um, but it's also, you know, interesting contrast between, you know, the first hour.

[00:34:41] In the last few minutes, right, so the beginning of the story, the end of the story, and, and, um, you know, Genette's idea about duration is, is, I think, particularly relevant here, right? So in the beginning, we have this kind of extended narration about waking up and thinking where he is and all that stuff.

[00:35:02] Um, thoughts about that?

[00:35:05] **Susan:** Yeah, so I think the beginning, you know, this we could divide this story into thirds and it is a morning to morning story. As you say, um, it's interesting that there's no real daytime in this. There's morning and then there's evening and that the whole rest of the day is just bracketed off.

[00:35:22] Um, it's not a place of tension. Yeah, right. But the beginning of the story, I think he's really that in intense detail about putting on his clothes and his really terror when he wakes up, that terror of the Arab who might be found out, um, is, you know, the detail there. The pace is very, very slow. Um, and the pace is somewhat slow at the end as well.

[00:35:51] Um, so we have the first third. And then the last third, um, and, and Herzl waking up in two different places. In both places. He panics mm-hmm. when he wakes up so that it, we see that his morning mode really is that panic of who he is and how to be safe. Yeah.

[00:36:10] **Jim phelan:** Right. But, but I think the duration is interesting in that because of, of the way it.

[00:36:14] It, it, um, nuances that a little bit, right? So when he wakes up, uh, you know, in the old city, right? Um, the, the anxiety lasts much longer, right? When he wakes up in his own place, it's, he's terrified at first, but then, you know, um, as soon as he looks around and he sees Noga, he seems to be okay.

[00:36:41] Right.

[00:36:42] **Susan:** Yeah. Then it's safe. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And you know, I dunno if we wanna cycle back to this, but, um, you know, there is a big shift in focalization Yeah. That we should talk about too. Um, yeah, let's, let's do that. The whole first part of the story is really. Really, we're inside Herzl and we're living his anxiety in, you know, every step in the old city is frightening.

[00:37:06] Um, the breathing, the sigh of relief when he gets to Uzishkin Street, a street, by the way, named for a founder of the Jewish National Front. So an arch Zionist, um, in one of the venerable neighborhoods, um, of Jerusalem, in fact, where the prime minister lives, um, and

[00:37:28] So we're, we're inside his perspective because we, you know, really getting a sense of how he feels after he tells the story. It's, we're seeing almost entirely through Noga, you know, and so we have the kind of external view of Herzl. We don't get a lot about her feelings. Well, I guess we do. Um, you know, she's in this strange space, she first thinks it's all a joke, um, and then she's trying to cope with this new person, um, in this strange world.

[00:38:00] But that shift, I think, is crucial.

[00:38:02] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, right. And I think, you know, just to maybe take that a little bit further, um, we do see him, you know, Very much with his vocalization, he thinks about the story he's going to tell her and and so on and he wants this to be You know close the distance, right? I'll tell her the truth and then we can go, right?

[00:38:22] And then when we get her vocalization, we see that She can't, you know, she can't get her head around it, right? The way she can do it is to say, Oh, he's entertaining me. He's telling me the story. He's doing his, you know, his wit, his humor, right? And so that distance never closes.

[00:38:45] **Susan:** Right. In fact, maybe even grows until that moment in the morning where she kind of is trying to

[00:38:50] integrate him, but I mean, Kashua pulls out a lot of stereotypes there, you know, um, in the bar, the smoking Palestinian, Palestinian smokes, doesn't smoke in the daytime, he smokes at night. Um, yeah, yeah. What he drinks. Um,

[00:39:07] **Jim phelan:** right. Right. Yeah. The transformation, uh, that, yeah. And I think, you know, the, having her on the scene and her focalization, right.

[00:39:17] to do that sort of reinforces that sense of, well, he looks the same, but he is somebody, you know, completely different. Um,

[00:39:25] **Susan:** and, and she remains a kind of naive, uh, consciousness. Um, cause at the end she says, Oh, are you from Hamas or something? Yeah. Um, and he says, you know, popular front, how dare you, but these are both radical.

[00:39:38] You know, groups. So, in a way, that's an internal distinction that she probably doesn't even understand.

[00:39:44] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that, that, um, you know, the choice to make her, um, you use the word gullible and naive, um, you know, but, but she doesn't, she's, even if she's gullible, she can't believe, right? Right, right. So there's something about the, the distance there.

[00:40:05] **Susan:** Right. And, and by the way, we could just make a brief comment on, you know, sort of, um, casual, obvious sexism of, you know, the representation of no, Noga, Anna von something. You know, um, it's there. Yeah, right,

[00:40:22] **Jim phelan:** right, okay. Yeah, I mean, Anna von, something kind of... She really, you know... Pretty bad. His attitudes about art, right, right, yeah.

[00:40:31] Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, right, yeah, okay. Um, I think, you know, one of the other things, too, is the, um, the way in which we get references to the, um, You know, the re, connections between language and culture and, uh, you know, the, okay, so the only words that, you know, the Arabs, or that he uses when he's an Arab is okay and shekel and checkpoint, um, or we see him in dreaming in another language when and all that.

[00:41:10] So, you know, in a way, the story kind of suggests that the two cultures have different languages, um, you know, strongly and that's reflective of a different culture. But I think, you know, when we chatted the other day, you mentioned, well, that's maybe a, you know, an exaggeration for the purpose of the story if we look at the way things are in the, you know, historical, uh, real world.

[00:41:37] It's... It's... It's much more intermingled.

[00:41:42] **Susan:** It's a little more fluid, but I would also say the percentage of Jewish Israelis who can understand Arabic is small. There's a lot of linguistic intermingling of words, but not of, not of the ability to speak. Um, I would say

Palestinians know more Hebrew because of the way the state functions, Palestinians in East Jerusalem, than, um, then Israeli Jews know Arabic.

[00:42:08] Um, but it's also significant that English is the lingua franca. English is the common language, uh, which means that, uh, often when Palestinians and Jewish Israelis are communicating, they're communicating in a language that is not the native language of either. Just, there's a lot of potential for misunderstanding there.

[00:42:32] **Jim phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, would that take us back to the, what you mentioned earlier about the choice that Keshua makes to write, um, in Hebrew, you know, rather than either English or Arabic?

[00:42:46] **Susan:** Yeah. So there's a little bit of a story there. I'll just say quickly that, um, he was, uh, he grew up in Tira, which is a Palestinian city in, in Israel.

[00:42:56] Um, but he was then chosen to attend an elite, really the elite, uh, high school in Jerusalem as one of very few Arab students. And so all of his literary education, all of his formal, uh, later education there and at the Hebrew university is in Hebrew. So Hebrew is really his literary language. Yeah, I see.

[00:43:19] Yeah. Yeah. Um, but it is a controversial choice for a Palestinian and, you know, uh, can be seen as a kind of, you know, choice of, you know, using the language of the other, the language of the dominant and the enemy.

[00:43:34] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, and would he be accused of betraying?

[00:43:39] **Susan:** be, could be. And also by Jewish Israelis, you know, this is a Jewish language.

[00:43:45] Yeah, right. And what he's really doing is saying, this is the language of Israelis. And 20 percent of Israelis are Palestinian. This is our, this is the language of this country. Right.

[00:43:56] **Jim phelan:** Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So it's

[00:43:57] **Susan:** powerful. It's a powerful choice.

[00:43:59] **Jim phelan:** Yeah. Exactly. And the interesting, it gets right to the politics of language.

[00:44:05] Right. Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Terrific. Yeah. Um, so then maybe, you know, we could spend a little bit of time just pulling some of these threads together and talking about what you see as a kind of the. cultural and political work that the story is trying to do.

[00:44:26] **Susan:** So I think, you know, some of it is fairly obvious in some ways because this is an allegory, um, it's hard to miss, uh, the implications. I do think we want to keep in mind that the implied reader would be a reader of Haaretz would be a center or center left or left leaning, um, Jewish Israeli person, and that's actually significant because he's speaking to he's not speaking to, you know, people who aren't thinking about these issues, but he's still saying in a way, um, Think more, think deeper, learn more, um, in, in making this, in creating this story.

[00:45:07] Um, I think he's sending out something of a warning, um, saying that there's a world that the reader doesn't know that. I mean, it's a political world. It's an activist world. It's a world that is working to make change.

[00:45:27] **Jim phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think, and I think maybe even coming back to the, the way he handles the personal, all right, that, um, maybe there's a kind of, you know, opportunity, right?

[00:45:40] If, if, uh, Herzl could convince Noga, right, to sort of see some kind of coming together or some closing of distance or something, but, but that doesn't work, right? Right. And, and, and even with, Uh, Herzl himself, right, it's, he remains divided, right? He's not able to kind of integrate these identities. Um, Right.

[00:46:02] Would you say it's a pessimistic story or is it just, or would you want to put more emphasis on what you were saying about, you know, the warning and the calling attention to, you know, this, these things for. The primary audience.

[00:46:23] **Susan:** Yeah, I think it's mixed.

[00:46:24] Um, I mean, this is something, you know, because there are elements of humor Um, in the story and, um, this is something Keshua does often, is use humor and then just turn it a little bit. Uh huh, uh huh. You go, ooh, you know. But so I think I think it's a mix. I think it's dismaying that Herzl at the end says let them burn So it's if he cannot integrate these two selves, but I think there's also a call for the reader Yeah, you know to do a better job to do to go to go beyond right?

[00:46:56] Yeah, right

[00:46:58] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah good. Okay, and then so even something from the Our experience of seeing, occupying the two sides, you know, or being, being immersed in, in him as, with his Arab identity and, and then. Coping with that as an Israeli and Noga's that. Yeah,

[00:47:18] **Susan:** and I can just say a quick word about his last name.

[00:47:20] I didn't mention this. Haliva could also be Haliwa. Um, that can be a V or a W, and that is a name that is shared by, um, By, uh, some Jews and some Arabs, that last name. So the last name itself is a kind of duality. And it also says that although the languages are different in some places, they really do converge.

[00:47:45] **Jim phelan:** Yeah. Well, that's great. I mean, and then even you just think about the first two words of the story after the title are the name, right? Name. Yeah, and then those names have all those associations and he's, he's launching right there with the, with the name, all these, all these issues. Yeah, yeah, that's great.

[00:48:04] Could we just touch on before we, um, come to the end, um, is the, is the tense, right? This is maybe a little bit nerdy, but, but, um, you know, that we have a, it seems in the translation, the dominant tense is the historical present or, or simultaneous present, like this.

[00:48:27] Simultaneous present. He's, he's, you know, narrating as things are unfolding. The

[00:48:32] **Susan:** narrative now is, I think, beginning. Talking

[00:48:34] **Jim phelan:** about... Right, right, exactly. Yeah, yeah. Simultaneous and, and there's no retrospection, right? So, neither narrator nor reader sort of knows what the outcome will be and so that doesn't inform, you know, the telling or, or processing of the telling.

[00:48:53] Um, so, you know, what, what, what sort of effects fall from that, do you think?

[00:49:01] **Susan:** Well, I think it, you know, it does carry that sense of continuity. This is going to happen again and again, um, it isn't changing, um,

you know, this is the way things are. So it could, in that sense, um, you know, be a little more of a, of a pessimistic, uh, Verb tends to use.

[00:49:22] Yes. It didn't just happen once. Uh, the Hebrew actually mixes the past and present verbs in a way that doesn't really work for translation in English. It's intriguing that there is somewhat something of a mix. Yeah. Um, in a way. Yeah. Um, but yeah,

[00:49:38] **Jim phelan:** yeah, yeah. It's like, yeah, like,

[00:49:41] **Susan:** yeah. And then there is that whole analeptic section.

[00:49:43] I mean, the one time we really are not in the present is when. We get the backstory of Herzl's childhood and what, uh, and that's interesting because it's a very complicated childhood, the childhood of, and adulthood, of course, too, of having to hide. Yes. I think we can also see that as something, I mean, think about, uh, race in the United States.

[00:50:05] We think about passing. Mm hmm. pressures to be like the dominant group. And we, we see that in the child Herzl in a very, really a poignant way. Yeah, I agree.

[00:50:17] **Jim phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And in that way, I mean, that's one of the things that, you know, that struck me about the kind of, um, efficiency of the story, right?

[00:50:29] Because once we get this, well, how did this happen, and all this, and what was it like? And, and he's got, he's able to address it that way with, especially with that analeptic stretch.

[00:50:42] **Susan:** Yeah. Yeah. And he's really, when he, and those memories, I mean, the refugee dreams on the one hand, and wanting to go in the army, and being, you know, prevented.

[00:50:50] You've really got these iconic, um, You know, histories and aspirations of two peoples, you know,

[00:51:00] **Jim phelan:** in there. Yeah, yeah. Great. Well, are there any, um, final thoughts or things that you hope we get to that we haven't?

[00:51:09] **Susan:** Well, there's probably things we didn't get to and I hope people listening will get to them on their own.

[00:51:16] Sayed is just a brilliant screenwriter. And I really encourage people to watch episodes of Arab labor or of his new, his new, um, TV series, which is called Madrasa, which is set in a bilingual Arab, uh, Arabic Hebrew school in Jerusalem. And it's an analog for a real school.

[00:51:43] Um, but I would love to, I imagine “Herzl disappears at midnight” as a That it could be a really interesting little short film, you know? Yeah, yeah, right. It would really be fun to see those places and to capture the humor and capture the confusion of those two worlds.

[00:52:03] **Jim phelan:** Yeah, great. Okay, that's a good place to end because it takes us to more we can do.

[00:52:09] Thank you so much, Sue. Um, this was really enjoyable. And, uh, I want to thank our listeners and say that we're always happy to get your feedback, which you can send to us at projectnarrative@osu.edu, um, or on our Facebook page or to the Twitter account, [@PNohiostate](https://twitter.com/PNohiostate) And I'll also say you can find more than 20 other episodes of the podcast at the Project Narrative website or on Apple Podcasts.