Kelly Marsh: [00:00:00] At the moment, he is reading \_Anna Karenina\_. Towards the end of one afternoon, his heart leaps and he has to catch his breath. He puts the book down and whispers to himself, "My God". His stepmother calls him downstairs for dinner. He sits at the table in silence, but he cannot eat. He stares at his brothers, at his father, at his stepmother.

Do they not understand? Anna has thrown herself in front of a train.

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 a typical episode, a narrative theorist selects a short narrative to read and discuss with me. Today I'll be talking with Kelly Marsh, who has selected Caryl Phillips's short piece of life writing, \_Growing Pains: A Life in 10 Chapters\_, which was first published in \_The Guardian\_ in August, 2005. Kelly Marsh is Professor of English at Mississippi State [00:01:00] University, and her areas of expertise include narrative theory, and global fiction in English since 1950. Kelly is the author of \_The Submerged Plot and the Mother’s Pleasure from Jane Austen to Arundhati Roy, \_and of essays on Roddy Doyle, Helen Fielding, Marina Carr, Mary McCarthy, and others. Kelly is also an award-winning teacher and a storied member of the International Society for the Study of Narrative. Kelly has recently been elected as Second Vice President of the Society, which means that she'll become President in 2027. Kelly, welcome to the podcast. Kelly, is there anything you'd like our listeners to pay special attention to as you read the story?

Kelly Marsh: Thanks, Jim. Thank you so much for inviting me, I'm really happy to be here today. Caryl Phillips is an English novelist, whose parents immigrated to England from St. Kitts in the Caribbean when he was an infant in 1958, and in 2005, the UK newspaper, \_The Guardian,\_ asked Phillips to write [00:02:00] something about the books he read growing up and how those influenced him as a writer.

In response, he produced this narrative, which was later collected in his 2011 book of essays, \_Color Me English: Reflections on Belonging Before and After 9/11.\_

Jim Phelan: Okay. That, great, that's a good way to frame the reading. Now, here's Kelly Marsh reading \_Growing Pains: A Life in 10 Chapters\_ by Caryl Phillips.

Kelly Marsh: Chapter One.

He lives in Leeds, in the north of England. His is a strange school, for there is a broad white line in the middle of the playground. The boys and girls from the local housing estate have to play on one side of the line. His immigrant parents own their small house, and so he is instructed to play on the other side of the line.

He's the only black boy in the school. When the bell signals the end of playtime, the two groups, one neatly dressed, the other group more discernibly scruffy, retreat into their separate buildings. The five-year-old boy [00:03:00] is beginning to understand difference in the form of class. The final lesson of the day is story time.

The neatly dressed children sit cross-legged on the floor at the feet of their teacher, Ms. Teale. She begins to read them a tale about \_Little Black Sambo\_. He can feel eyes upon him. He now wishes that he was on the other side of the line with the scruffy children. Either that, or would the teacher please read them a different story.

Chapter Two.

He is a 7-year-old boy and he has changed schools. At this new school, there are no girls. His teacher asks him to stay behind after the lesson has finished. He's told that he must take his story and show it to the teacher in the next classroom. He isn't sure if he's being punished, but slowly he walks the short way up the corridor and shows the story to the other teacher, Miss Holmes. She sits on the edge of her desk and reads it. [00:04:00] Then ,Miss Holmes looks down at him, but at first, no words are exchanged, and then she speaks. "Well done. I'll hold on to this."

Chapter Three.

The 8-year-old boy seems to spend whole days with his head stuck in books. His mother encourages him to get into the habit of going to the local library every Saturday, but he can only take out four books at a time, and by Monday he's read them all. Two brothers up the street sometimes let him borrow their Enid Blyton paperbacks. The Famous Five adventure stories.

Julian, Dick, Anne, George and Timmy the dog are the first literary lives that he intimately engages with. However, he tells his mother that he does not understand why the boy's mother warms the Enid Blyton paperbacks in the oven when he returns them. The two brothers have mentioned something to him about germs.

His mother is furious. She forbids him to borrow any more books from these two [00:05:00] boys. He begins to lose touch with Julian, Dick, Anne, George, and Timmy the dog.

Chapter Four.

His parents have recently divorced. He's nine and he's spending the weekend with his father, who seems to have little real interest in the son.

He senses that his father is merely fulfilling a duty, but the son needs the father's attention and so he writes a story. The story includes the word "glistening" and "glittering", which have a glamour that the son finds alluring. When the son eventually hands the story to his father, the father seems somewhat baffled by this offering.

His father is an immigrant, this much he already understands. But it is only later that he realizes that imaginative writing played no part in his father's colonial education as a subject of the British empire. His father's rudimentary schooling never embraced poetic conceit, such as those his son seems determined to indulge in. As the father hands back the story [00:06:00] to his son, a gap begins to open up between the two of them.

Chapter Five.

He's only 10 years old when his father decides that it's fine to leave him all alone in his spartan flat while he goes to work the night shift at the local factory. There is no television, no radio, nothing to seize his attention beyond the few comic books and soccer magazines that the son has brought with him from his mother's house.

Then, late at night alone in the huge double bed, he leans over and discovers a paperback in the drawer of the bedside table, and he begins to read the book. It is a true story about a white American man who has made himself Black in order that he might experience what it is like to be a colored man.

The 10-year-old boy reads John Howard Griffin's \_Black Like Me\_, and, alone in his father's double bed, he tries hard not to be afraid. That night, he leaves the lights on, and in the morning he is still awake as his exhausted [00:07:00] father slides into the bed next to him.

Chapter Six.

At 16, he has no girlfriend.

The truth is, his brothers aside, he has few friends of any kind, and he seldom speaks with his father or stepmother. During the long summer holiday, he locks himself away in his bedroom and he reads one large 19th century novel after another. He learned how to lose himself in the world and lives of others, and in this way, he does not have to think about the woeful state of his own life.

At the moment, he is reading \_Anna Karenina\_. Towards the end of one afternoon, his heart leaps and he has to catch his breath. He puts the book down and whispers to himself, "My God". His stepmother calls him downstairs for dinner. He sits at the table in silence, but he cannot eat. He stares at his brothers, at his father, at his stepmother.

Do they not understand? Anna has thrown herself in front of a train.

Chapter Seven.

He's 18 [00:08:00] and he has completed his first term at university. He cannot go back to his father's house, and so he travels 150 miles north to his mother's place. Mother and son have not, of late, spent much time in each other's company.

His mother does not understand that her 18-year-old son is now, according to him, a man. They argue, and he gets in the car and drives off in a fit of frustration. He stops the car in the local park and opens his book. However, he cannot get past the sheer audacity of the first sentence of James Baldwin's \_Blues for Mister Charlie. \_"And may every 'n-word' like this 'n-word' end like this 'n-word' - face down in the weeds!". This 18-year-old "man" is completely overwhelmed by Baldwin's brutal prose. He reads this one sentence over and over and over again, and then he closes the book and decides that he should go back and make up with his [00:09:00] mother.

Chapter Eight.

His tutor has asked to see him in his office. Dr. Rabbitt informs the student that he has passed the first part of his degree in psychology, neurophysiology, and statistics, but he reassures the student that at 19 there is still time for him to reconsider his choice of a degree. Does he really wish to pursue psychology?

The student patiently explains that he wishes to understand people, and that before university he was assiduously reading Jung and Freud for pleasure. His unmoved tutor takes some snuff and then rubs his beard. So, you wanna know about people, do you? He patiently explains to the student that William James was the first professor of psychology at Harvard, but it was his brother, Henry, who really knew about people.

The student looks at Dr. Rabbitt, but he is unsure what to say. His tutor helps him to make the decision. "Literature. If you want to know about people, study [00:10:00] English literature, not psychology."

Chapter Nine.

He's 20, and for the first time since arriving in England as a four month old baby, he has left the country. He has traveled to the United States and crossed the huge exciting nation by Greyhound Bus. After three weeks on the road, he knows that soon he will have to return to England and complete his final year of university. In California, he goes into a bookstore. He buys a copy of a book that has on the cover a picture of a young man who looks somewhat like himself. He takes the book to the beach and sits on a deck chair and begins to read. When he finishes Richard Wright's \_Native Son,\_ it is almost dark and the beach is deserted. But he now knows what he wishes to do with his life. And then, sometime later, he is grateful to discover that mere ambition is fading and is being replaced by something infinitely more powerful: purpose.

Chapter [00:11:00] 10.

He sits with his great-grandmother in the small village at the far end of St. Kitts, the island on which he was born 28 years earlier. He has now published two novels, and on each publication day he has asked his editor to send a copy of the book to his great-grandmother. But she has never mentioned the books and so gingerly he now asks her if she ever received them? Does she have them? When she moves it is like watching a statue come to life. She reaches beneath the chair and slowly pulls out two brown cardboard bundles. The books are still in their packaging. She has opened the bundles, looked at the books, and then neatly replaced them. Again, she opens the packaging. She fingers the books in the same way he has seen her finger her Bible. Then, she looks at her great grandson and smiles. "I was the teacher's favorite," she says. She was born in 1898, and so he realizes that she is talking to him about life at the dawn of the 20th century. "And," she continues, "I missed a lot of [00:12:00] school for I had to do all the errands." Suddenly, he understands what she means. She cannot read. He swallows deeply and lowers his eyes. How could he be clumsy enough to cause her this embarrassment? She carefully puts the books. Back in their cardboard packaging and tucks them back under the chair.

She looks at her great grandson. She doted on this boy for the first four months of his life. The great grandson who disappeared to England. The great grandson who all these years later now sends her stories from England.

Jim Phelan: Okay, Kelly, thank you. Well, maybe a good place to start would be, to think about this narrative as a response to the request he got from \_The Guardian\_. And so, rather than talking about authors and books that influenced him, he composes this, you know, which I suppose we could call a mini Künstlerroman, right? This piece of how I became an [00:13:00] artist, right, this "life in ten chapters". And you know, there's a sense in which, from our perspective, we could say he's kind of doing a genre switch.

You know, the interviewer is, you know, working in one genre, the author talking about influences, and Philips responds with another, okay, here's the story of how I became an artist in these, you know, this short version of that, obviously, with the segments and so on. So, if that makes sense, maybe you could start by talking about what stands out for you in this "life in ten chapters", and even, you know, think about when he tells it, right? So he's, what, age 47, and at the last chapter, 10, he says he is 28. So, you know, what do you think about this sort of act of, you know, telling the story of how he became the artist at this point, and in this way?

Kelly Marsh: Of course almost all writers get asked this question, and they mostly list books that have been models for them, for their prose style or their [00:14:00] characters, or how they create a fictional world.

Sometimes, like Jesmyn Ward talking about Faulkner, they'll explain what they really admire about a writer from the past, and then also what's missing or misrepresented in that fictional world that inspired them to create their own. But Philips goes on, I think, in a different direction here, emphasizing not just books that influenced his writing, but also books that changed him.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And his most intimate relationships. And, as that title \_Growing Pains\_ indicates, he lists not only the books that influenced him for the better, but also those that worked against his growth, together. I was thinking about Junot Diaz's \_The Books of Losing You\_, which Christopher Gonzalez talked about on this podcast.

That's another short narrative in which a writer is talking about books that influenced him, and even though that particular narrator wasn't maybe ready to learn from those books the first time he read them, he doesn't even leave any doubt that he was supposed to learn from those.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. And in that case, it's so much also on the relationship, right?

Kelly Marsh: Mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: [00:15:00] Between Yunior, and his girlfriend or the woman that he's been involved with off and on. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: Right. Phillips does that too with the relationships, but also he includes books that he's had to overcome.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: Like \_Little Black Sambo\_, and maybe  Enid Blyton' s The Famous Five.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, and I mean, I think it's complicated with some of those. I mean, \_Little Black Sambo\_, sure, but also like the scenes of reading, right, of those books, right? And so, in the, the school in chapter one with \_Little Black Sambo\_, he's the only Black boy in the school, in his half of the school, and you know, what does that mean, right? And with the  Enid Blyton , it's more that, you know, the mother of the friends puts the books in the oven, right? It's not so much the books, you know, it's a little different scenario, I think.

Kelly Marsh: Although, of course the Enid Blyton books represent English life in a way that I think excludes, [00:16:00] I think.

Jim Phelan: Yes, sure.

Kelly Marsh: I mean, she wrote 21 books, I can't speak authoritatively, but I believe that maybe excludes the experience of English people of color, for example.

Jim Phelan: Right, yeah. Yeah. But it's interesting, then, I think, though that he's reading them with interest, right? And then maybe we could jump ahead to the \_Black\_\_ Like Me\_, the John Howard Griffin book, right, which he has this very, you know, strong relationship to, or strong response to.

Kelly Marsh: Yes.

Jim Phelan: Because, you know, that book, which I read a long time ago, is really about a white person discovering, you know, what it's like to be a Black person in the U.S., and it's a very painful discovery, right? So, there's that sense of if he, you know, Phillips could imagine himself as a Black person in the U.S., You know, which then I think becomes interesting when he talks about taking the bus trip across the U.S., right, and then, you know, discovering Richard Wright.

Kelly Marsh: [00:17:00] So, I think focusing in on his nighttime reading of \_Black Like Me\_ calls attention to something else you were, you were mentioning that, instead of a continuous narrative, we have these moments.

Jim Phelan: Okay.

Kelly Marsh: But, as Philip offers us these memories of these moments that really changed him, he creates connections and contrasts between them in a way that helps us fill in some of what isn't said, and also that helps make sense of what are sometimes ambiguous and contradictory experiences in themselves. So, just preceding the chapter in which he reads \_Black Like Me\_, is the chapter in which he shows a story that he's written to his father.

Jim Phelan: Yes.

Kelly Marsh: And his father hasn't understood it, and he says, later, he, the child, realizes that imaginative writing played no part in his father's colonial education, and that a gap opened up between the two of them, but I wonder if he wants us to see in chapter five that gap may be closing just a little bit. I do realize that later he indicates that there's a [00:18:00] split of some kind, but, when he finds a book in his dad's bedside table, he realizes that, okay, well maybe his father hasn't read fiction.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: But, his father has a relationship with books and I wonder also if reading \_Black Like Me\_ as a 10-year-old child gives the character new insight into what his father might have seen and endured as a Black man.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: He may have a new understanding, so at first he was angry, discouraged because his dad left him all alone all night. By the time this night is over and he has indeed experienced the great fear, both from being alone and from reading this account.

But, by the time his dad gets home, he can see him as exhausted and maybe he starts to understand just a little bit what his dad's life is like.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. No, that's great. I, I really like that. I think too, it, it highlights, you know, the other feature of this Künstlerroman that sort of runs as a thread through it in the sense that it's about his experiences as a writer, as a reader, [00:19:00] and about how these experiences have influences on his family life or how he relates to other members of the family, right? You know, his mother is intervening with the Enid Blyton books or with the treatment of them, right? The father here, and this what you nicely point out about the, the juxtaposition of these two chapters, the gap that emerges. And we won't say necessarily that the gap closes because there is some, you know, difference, but then, then also there's a, we're invited to say, all right, well, there's some, some kind of understanding on the young boy's part about his father and his father's experience. And then, of course, when we get to chapter 10, the last chapter, we get back to the great-grandmother.

Maybe we'll save the discussion of chapter 10 for a little bit. Cause then we, maybe we could talk a little bit about some other aspects of the form, right? So, you know, one of the things that's striking, I think, is that we [00:20:00] have historical present tense, right, and also that it's a Künstlerroman, but Phillips is talking about himself in the third person, right?

And, so there, that in itself kind of creates an interesting relationship, say, if we think about Phillips as the author who's constructing this, and then he, you know, chooses to narrate in this way with a narrator who's not entirely restricted, but mostly restricted to historical present.

And then the character whom he refers to in the third person, we sort of get, you know, a sense of, okay, we have these three agents and they're, they're really doing, you know, different kinds of things. So those are my observations about it, but what, you know, I offer them to you.

What, what do you make of that? What sort of follows from that for us as readers?

Kelly Marsh: I think one thing, the present tense, the narrator, I think uses the present tense to keep us very close to the character's experience.

Jim Phelan: Yes. Okay.

Kelly Marsh: Maybe simultaneously, the [00:21:00] author is using that third person narrator to keep a distance, so even as the narrator closes a distance, the author may be widens one. He, he leaves his own current interpretation of those experiences and his current feelings about those experiences unstated.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, yeah.

Kelly Marsh: He expects us to infer them, but he doesn't state them, so the author keeps his distance from us while the narrator keeps us close to the character.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. It's an interesting choice, right? There's a lot of discussion and, you know, about narrative identity, right, the idea that an individual, who we think we are is related to the narrative that we construct about our lives, right? And that, that way, that narrative, identity thesis sort of emphasizes continuity among who we are now, who we were, and so on. This third person in the historical present sort of emphasizes distance, and not, I don't wanna say, he's, you know, saying, [00:22:00] well, you know, I don't recognize that boy or anything like that, but he is saying, okay, I'm really, I'm looking back here, and I'm gonna look back at these moments, at these kind of snapshots, and, you know, accumulate for you, but then maybe also accumulate for me, right, like, there may be a sense of his own making sense of, you know, how he became who he was, right?

Kelly Marsh: Yeah, I agree. And I think there may be moments when the author, the constructing eye, maybe comes in a little closer.

I've been wondering if the couple of instances of prolepsis maybe close that distance a little bit.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: It's only later that he realizes imaginative writing was not part of his father's education.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: Sometime later, he's grateful to feel not just ambition, but perfect purpose. That seems like maybe the constructing eye feeling a little bit closer to that.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And maybe the couple of instances of free indirect discourse, in which the [00:23:00] narrator, in a sense, the narrator's just getting closer to the character by channeling the character's consciousness when he says would the teacher please read them a different story, but I almost feel like the constructing eye is showing himself just a little bit, like he can't resist, he remembers that emotion well enough that he can't resist.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. It's almost like doubled there that we have the character's perspective, obviously for characters, you know, indirect discourse, but maybe also the, you know, constructing eye to the, the time of the telling and the time of the action sort of are layered on top of each other in some of that free indirect discourse.

Kelly Marsh: Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, so then the, you know, the other thing, we've touched on this a little bit, but maybe we could focus on it for a few minutes; the idea that we have 10 chapters, right, and he calls out each, you know, chapter one, chapter two, like, and when you were reading, you paused between them, and, you know, so he's saying, all right, I'm gonna divide my story into these 10 [00:24:00] segments. What do you make of that, you know, aspect of the form?

Kelly Marsh: Yeah, it's so noticeable because there's so much more that he could tell us if he would choose to. When did his father get married?

Where did these brothers suddenly, when did they come into the picture?

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: W hen he is 18, why does he feel he cannot go to his father's house? So, there are things that we wish we would know that we can't know.

Jim Phelan: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: But, and this is returning a bit, I think that, it seems to me the constructing eye's interest is in forming connections between these moments.

So, I gave an example about the connection between his father not understanding his story in chapter four, and him understanding his father a little better in chapter five.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: Can I give another example of...?

Jim Phelan: Yeah, please. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: Chapters one and two. In chapter one, he, as a five-year-old is observing it, clearly recognizing the biases and prejudices of the teacher who's been put in authority over him and the school system that he's entered.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: Children are physically separated based [00:25:00] on their social class, and the teacher endorses the racist representation of people of color in Little Black Sambo, so, that's his experience as a five-year-old. But then, in chapter two, as a 7-year-old, when a teacher praises him for a story that he's written, he can't feel trust for the teacher.

I think that that comes through, her praise doesn't seem, in the way that it's described, narrated, a cause for celebration, rather, he quote, isn't sure if he's being punished.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: So, I feel like that's a connection, like maybe this could have been a good moment.

Jim Phelan: Uhhuh.

Kelly Marsh: If it hadn't been for those initial experiences and all of the experiences he's accumulated since he was five.

Jim Phelan: So that's nice. Like, so you're saying that the segmentivity, he's sort of inviting us to read across the segments, don't take them as totally discreet, right? Okay, good. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And, sort sort of on the same, on the same topic, it's possible we're supposed to understand that even though this teacher, when he's seven years old, seems to be praising him for this, is praising him for this story, we've seen that other [00:26:00] teacher, we're not sure we have reason to think this teacher is so different and the teacher does not seem enthusiastic.

She looks at him for a long moment.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, right.

Kelly Marsh: She's sort of holding him in suspense, and she seems perhaps suspicious or at least surprised, and this remains, this impression remains with him just as much as the praise she has given, so.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, right. Good, I mean, the emphasis really on being called out, right, not being, you know, affirmed, it's not like, oh, I'm excited, well, we have to show this to, you know, the other teacher, right, I'm gonna bring it to her, and then we finally get the praise. But it's because of the context it's so muted and we don't feel that he feels it as a strong affirmation.

Kelly Marsh: Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Nice. Yeah, okay. So we already talked a little bit about the focus on reading, writing, and family, but if we sort of stick with the attention to how the segments get organized, right; one observation is that we have the [00:27:00] 10 chapters, but they're sort of three groups, four, four and two, right? When in the first group, we sort of alternate between one's reading, one's writing, one's reading, one's writing. Then, the next four are mostly about reading, and then the last two put reading and writing together, and each one we have, you know, his age is marked, right, he tells us how old he is, so. You know, he starts at 5, 7, 8, 9, and then 10, then we jump, 16, 18, 19, 20, and then we jump again to 28. Anything, you know, stand out to you there in terms of that kind of organization, either with the reading and the writing or the, you know, seems like, oh, we're gonna get every year for a bit and then we jump. What makes sense to you, yeah?

Kelly Marsh: Maybe in the, an initial enthusiasm for writing followed by maybe some trepidation during those teenage years. It's one possibility, [00:28:00] because clearly he moves away and thinks he's gonna major in psychology.

Jim Phelan: Right, yeah.

Kelly Marsh: It's just one small implication, I think, of that.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: You noted that he ends this when he is 28, so that's worth thinking about, that's the largest jump.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. Yeah, we have six years between 10 and 16, and then we have 20 to 28. So what if we, if we think about the jump between 10 and 16 in relationship to what we've been saying about... you know, so, 10, I mean, you know, when he is 10, he gets the \_Black Like Me\_, story, right, and there's sort of reconnection with his father. And then, chapter six at 16 we started, he has no girlfriend, right, which is kind of, I mean, interesting stands out, right? And then, this is about reading \_Anna Karenina\_. So, you know what's happened between 10 and 16 and, and also no girlfriend and Anna Karenina, and what do you make of that?

Kelly Marsh: That's right. I think so prior [00:29:00] to that, it seems like we get that strong sense of a child, the character as a child, only partially understanding what he's seeing.

Jim Phelan: Okay.

Kelly Marsh: And the narrator very sympathetic about that. After that, about starting above the \_Anna Karenina\_ chapter, the narrator seems a little bit more to be smiling at the character, to be

recognizing the character's growing pains and indulging a bit. So, he's smiling at him for feeling like he wanted to be in 19th century novels so that he could not think about the woeful state of his own life, which could mean a number of things, but as you say, the passage does begin with, at 16, he had no girlfriend, which seems related, and so he falls in love with Anna.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And then, it's the very next chapter, chapter seven, when at 18, he thinks of himself as a man. And in this short paragraph, which is chapter seven, that idea of him as a man, once in quotation marks, comes up twice, and I think in a narrative this short, any repetition calls attention to [00:30:00] itself. So, he thought of himself as a man so much that he maybe didn't need to interact with his mother in the way that he should have been, but he is brought up short and he goes back and makes up with her, and I think that this is another place we have a connection between chapter seven and chapter eight.

He goes into talk to his tutor and we're told, the student patiently explains.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: So he goes in and patiently explains to his tutor, which I'm not sure that I would've noticed except for, right, that right after that, the tutor then patiently explains to the student.

Jim Phelan: The repetition again, right, yeah.

Kelly Marsh: So, the character has gone in to talk with his professor being like, he doesn't have anything left to learn.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, right.

Kelly Marsh: Similarly to how he was interacting with his mother.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, good.

Kelly Marsh: And so I think in these passages, the narrator is smiling a bit indulgently at the character and watching him grow up and learn.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, well, I mean, we could talk about some of these chapters in a little [00:31:00] bit more detail.

We go back to six, right, you know, this idea of we're invited to think he's falling in love with Anna, and then toward the end of one afternoon, his heart leaps and he has to catch his breath, puts the book down and whispers to himself, my God, stepmother calls him downstairs for dinner, he sits at the table in silence, but he cannot eat, he stares at his brothers, at his father, at his stepmother, and here we get the, you know, directives course, right? Do they not understand, anna has thrown herself in front of a train, right? So, on the one hand, we, you know, we're getting this distance again, right, but we're also getting something about, you know, his powerful response to Anna, right? There's a kind of, you know, testimony to the power of reading fiction here that, you know, if we're, again, if we're placing it in the context of the [00:32:00] Künstlerroman, this would seem to be a really kind of significant experience, right? You know, fiction can do this, kind of amazing. So it strikes me as really this kind of wonderfully, doubled experience, right? It's distancing himself, right, it's marking him off in a way similar to the chapter four where his father doesn't understand what he is writing, but here it's like these people don't get the experience of reading. So we get all that, and then there's also, like, you know, for him, this is such a powerful thing.

Kelly Marsh: Right. He's so wrapped up in books, there's a chance that he's recognizing through this narrative that that will cost him something, in terms of his relationships with other people.

He says he doesn't have any friends, he says he doesn't have a girlfriend.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: He struggles a bit with family, so, there's that.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And I wonder if it was also reflected in this choice of discussing his childhood self in the third [00:33:00] person.

Jim Phelan: Uhhuh.

Kelly Marsh: The person is so habituated to thinking of the most moving experiences he knows about and the people who mean so much to him as characters, and thinking of himself as a character may simply be a kind of act of, of love, I guess.

Jim Phelan: Hmm. Yeah, and I mean, I think your point about the awareness of, you know, what this cost him, right, this life of reading and writing is, you know, it takes us back to the title again, right? So, growing pains, right, each of these segments has its own, you know, pain in a way.

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: I mean, it's not only, it's not sort of unrelenting, but there's a tinge at least is there, like in chapter two, right, with the well done, okay, here's this, here's a recognition, but the way the recognition comes, the first recognition he tells about with his writing, it's not this unalloyed affirmation, as we said before, but this kind of painful thing.

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: And here, right, okay, in six with the \_Anna Karenina,\_ wow, he's so into it, [00:34:00] but it's also like, you know, it's as you were saying, okay, it's separating him from his family.

Kelly Marsh: You noted that he's 47 when he writes this.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: Of course he was asked to write this, so this is a bit of a coincidence, but he has said in an interview, when he finished his 2009 novel, which focuses on a protagonist who is a 47-year-old man, he said to an interviewer about that, 47 is an age when you start to really ask yourself some hard questions. And he meant this kinds of hard questions about how one has spent one's life and stuff, and I think he meant maybe some things that are related to this.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Okay, good. Maybe we should turn to chapter 10, then, or maybe let's think about nine and 10 together a little bit, and then we can make some connections to some of the other things, because, here we go, we start to move into the reading and writing together, right?

So if we, the first two groups, you know, we had the alternation, then we had the focus on reading, and now we're sort of putting [00:35:00] them together in some way. So let's, if we take a look at nine, right, he's 20, and this is when he goes to the U.S., and he goes into a bookstore in California, buys a copy of a book that has, on the cover, a picture of a young man who looks somewhat like himself, takes the book to the beach, sits on a deck chair, begins to read. When he finishes Richard Wright's \_Native Son,\_ it is almost dark and the beach is deserted, but he now knows what he wishes to do with his life. And then, as you pointed out, the prolepsis, sometime later, he's grateful to discover that mere ambition is fading, and is being replaced by something infinitely more powerful: purpose. So this, this becomes like a really big moment, right, this chapter nine is like, okay, so eight, we got all right, study English literature, nine, American literature, Richard Wright looks like me, et [00:36:00] cetera, and then ambition and purpose come together, right? So it's like, all right, this is a really significant event in the \* unintelligible\*.

What else stands out for you in this chapter?

Kelly Marsh: So, he has read works by American writers before.

Jim Phelan: Mm-hmm.

Kelly Marsh: Griffin, but also James Baldwin.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: And now he's actually in the U.S., reading Richard Wright, so he's clearly being influenced by what he knows about what's happening in terms of race in the US in the 1960s and the 1970s, well, I mean in the 1930s when he's reading \_Native Son,\_ and when he says a sense of purpose, seems like since he says the words, the huge, exciting nation is on my mind, and is he, is his purpose to write Black Britain the way that Baldwin and Wright and others have written about African America.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, yeah. Right, good. The other thing that, you know, stood out to me this time, maybe it's a result of our conversation, but, you know, [00:37:00] he takes the books to the beach, when he finishes Richard Wrights native son, it's almost dark, right? So, it's like he's having another \_Anna \_\_Karenina\_ experience, but this time with \_Native Son,\_ and with a different outcome, right? I mean ,that he now knows what he wishes to do with his life. Wow, you know, he did not, I mean, you know, that's amazing. And then sometime later, ambition is replaced by purpose. It's an interesting, you know, like the reading, writing really now coming together in a way where the \_Anna Karenina\_, we had the powerful reading and the, the awareness of the power of it, and now here harnessing that to ambition and then eventually purpose.

And, you know, the difference then between Tolstoy as Russian novelist and so on, and, as you were saying, right, that's, you know, Black writers, American nation, but then Black Britain, and so on.

Kelly Marsh: Right, and also the difference between [00:38:00] a 16-year-old who is writing, as the narrator says, to escape.

Jim Phelan: Yes.

Kelly Marsh: And a university educated literature major, who is also able to do more with those texts now, in addition to being clearly like, immersed.

Jim Phelan: Yes.

Kelly Marsh: All day long, in that he still has that, but he's got something else in addition now.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, no, that's really nice. Yeah.

Great. Okay, so then we come to chapter 10, as you said, the biggest jump from 20 to 28, and we can know, right, that he has had some success, right, the ambition and purpose have come together, he is, you know, established himself, he's got a couple novels, right? And here he is, visiting his great-grandmother.

What stands out for you here?

Kelly Marsh: So, one question you had had is, wonder why he stops at 28.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: So I, I guess I'm thinking there's something about this moment that makes him feel like a writer, like, indisputably and for life, a writer right now.

Jim Phelan: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And whether that's [00:39:00] that he has two books now or whether that he's back in this place where he was born.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: And sees these books in this place.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: Whatever it is. Maybe this is a moment.

Jim Phelan: Okay. Right, a

sign of the establishment, right, this is where I came from, but I've had this other life and yet now I've written enough and these things are here where I started from.

Yeah. Okay, so, that's one piece of it. Yeah. Great. And we we have the family side of it too now, right?

Kelly Marsh: Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Which has been a theme throughout.

Kelly Marsh: Yes.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: That free indirect discourse happens again, as before with a question.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: At this time, the question is, how could he be clumsy enough to cause her this embarrassment?

Jim Phelan: Right.

Kelly Marsh: Which sounds like a continuation, but I think that we can see how very sensitive he is now as an adult, really. I mean, he feels nervous, he, he didn't wanna hurt her, but of course he couldn't have known, and...

Jim Phelan: And he very, but he was also very interested in, well, what does she think,

right? Did she read them? What, did you know what, alright, I've sent them to her, [00:40:00] what, what hap... I haven't heard anything, right?

Kelly Marsh: That's right.

Jim Phelan: So, and the first free indirect discourse we get is, does she have them, right? Yeah, and then she gets them, right, okay, yeah. And then, then we get this, right, how could he be clumsy enough there, so the sensitivity there.

Kelly Marsh: Yeah, so he's castigating himself, so self-aware, but also I think we see his sensitivity. I don't know that I would immediately have understood what she was saying, but he does.

Jim Phelan: Uhhuh. Yes.

Kelly Marsh: I don't know that I would've understood, I missed a lot of school for I had to do all the errands. That's all he needs, and he gets it.

Jim Phelan: Right. Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: He doesn't put her in a position to have to say it, and so he, he actually has achieved great sensitivity.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Good. Yeah, and then because we can follow him, right, yeah. Also that he gives her the voice, right? I mean, it's, we don't get a lot of other direct discourse in these 10 chapters, right, but she has, I missed a lot of school for I had to do all the errands.

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: Okay, and then I think we come to the final sentences, right?

She looks at her great grandson after she's put [00:41:00] the books back. She doted on this boy for the first four months of his life. The great grandson who disappeared to England, the great grandson who all these years later now sends her stories from England. And that's where we end. So, you know, I think the focalization here is, is really interesting, right?

She looks at her grandson, so we have a sort of her perspective, right? And then the next sentence, she doted on this boy for the first four months of his life, right, that this boy, is, I don't know, it sort of makes me think, okay, he's doing her, right? He's, he's getting inside her head, right, this is what she's thinking, right?

Kelly Marsh: Yeah.

Jim Phelan: But in order to do that, he has to be sort of occupying her perspective as well, so it's like, again, it's doubled like we were talking about before. And then I would [00:42:00] say then that continues, right? So, she's looking at him as the great grandson who disappeared to England, but he's thinking of himself as the great grandson who disappeared to England, and the great grandson who all these years later now sends her stories from England.

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: On the one hand, as you were saying, I think the sensitivity, right, and the perspective taking, his ability to take her perspective, and then it's her perspective on him and him to sort of share that, right? He doesn't undercut it or anything.

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: You know, but also then to think about this as the end, right, the end of the story, right? So, you know, going back to what you were saying, yes, okay, this is 28, he's established himself. Okay, my  Künstlerroman is complete in the sense I'm now an artist, right?

But what about this way to end it, more particularly?

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Yeah, so yes, using his ability as an artist to do that. So, it seems like it could be free indirect discourse [00:43:00] in his mind, imagining her, but it all seems like free indirect discourse that is representing her consciousness.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: He's already established that there's a gap in that she can't read these books, but I think him ending with the phrase, sending her stories from England, so she can't read these novels, but he still feels like he's sending them to her. And the colonial education in the Caribbean has been evoked here.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: In this passage as well as in the passage about his father, and we know from that history that the stories from England that had characterized education in the Caribbean over many, many decades, well, a century.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Right, 1898, right?

Kelly Marsh: Yes. Yeah.

Were representation of an England that seemed very foreign to people living in the Caribbean, but yet they were taught this literature in a way that presumed they should consider themselves connected to it, [00:44:00] and I think many Caribbean writers write very clearly that being educated in this particular English literature, was damaging, divided them from their own place by making them think that the right place was somewhere else.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Kelly Marsh: So, I think just this last phrase is, stories from England, suggests the incredible difference in the stories that this writer can send from England, that could actually connect with this woman's experience.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Great. Great. Yeah, and I think too, it's also, again, we go back to the family thing, right? On the one hand, his life as writer has taken him away, right, from the family, and we have that to some degree underlined here because the great-grandmother can't read, and he's doing this whole thing and, you know, he can send her the stories, but she can't read them, so they don't have that connection. And yet, at the same time, there is this, you know, understanding between them, right, that okay, she's proud of [00:45:00] him, you know, he's can send the stories from England. You know, so it's a kind, it seems to me like a kind of very bittersweet, which is again, I think so appropriate in fitting with the idea of "growing pains", right?

This isn't  Künstlerroman of, you know, sort of total celebration, right, or achievement, right? It's about, you know, all these things we talked about, even the, the achievements have this underside of, of pain and so on. And I think here we get, we get that, as well as the connection between them and the distance he's traveled and the distance in time and distance in place and all that, right? And yet, they're together, they can, he could share her consciousness in some way, but at the same time, that doesn't erase all the differences, you know?

Kelly Marsh: Right.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. \_Growing Pains: A Life in 10 Chapters\_.

Kelly Marsh: Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Kelly, anything that you'd like to touch on that we haven't gotten to? Anything we missed?

Kelly Marsh: I don't think so. Thank you so much for discussing this [00:46:00] story and, also Jim, thank you for this podcast, which I have listened to every episode and many of them more than once, and I've been inspired in so many different ways, in my teaching and in my writing, so thank you.

Jim Phelan: Oh, great. Well that's, that's great, and thanks for being such a faithful listener and, now, such a wonderful contributor, so thanks so much Kelly. And I wanna thank our listeners, and say we'd appreciate your feedback, which you can send to us via email, projectnarrative@osu.edu, or on our Facebook page or to our Twitter / X, we are @PNOhioState.

I also want to mention that you can find more than 40 other episodes of the podcast at the Project Narrative website or on Apple Podcasts, and if you listen on Apple, I'll invite you to rate and review us. Thank you all again. [00:47:00]