Gary Weissman: [00:00:00] CHARLIE BROWN, walking down the street.

He is wearing his baseball cap and is smiling.

He meets Linus.

Charlie Brown says , "There's something magical about the very first baseball game of the season."

Linus says, "Schulz died last night."

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

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 Gary Weissman, who has selected a short story by Shalom Auslander, 'Smite the Heathens, Charlie Brown', which was included in Auslander's 2005 collection entitled \_Beware of God.\_ Gary Weissman is Associate Professor in the Department of English and in the School of Communication [00:01:00] Film and Media Studies at the University of Cincinnati. Gary also is an Affiliate Faculty member in UC's Department of Judaic Studies.

He's the author, of \_Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust,\_ Cornell, 2004, and \_The Writer in the Well: On Misreading and Rewriting Literature\_ published in the Theory and Interpretation of Narrative series at the Ohio State University Press in 2016. And as somebody who worked with Gary on that book, I wanna recommend it highly and say it was a great pleasure to work with Gary on it.

Gary has also written many essays on how the Holocaust has been represented in literature, scholarship, photography, and film, and in addition to being a scholar and teacher of graphic and animated narratives, Gary is himself a skillful cartoonist. So, Gary, welcome to the podcast. It's great to have you.

Anything you'd like to say to [00:02:00] introduce Auslander and his story?

Gary Weissman: Sure. First, Jim, I'd like to thank you so much for having me. You and Peter Rabin owitz were my on-ramp to narrative theory, and I had also the great fortune to participate in the Project Narrative Summer Institute with you and Brian McHale.

In addition to your scholarship, I greatly appreciate your kindness and generosity and really extraordinary work as a community builder in narrative theory. So, 'Smite the Heathens', as you said, is from Auslander's collection, beware of God. Auslander is an American novelist, memoirist, and essayist who grew up in a strict orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Monsey, New York, and then broke with that orthodoxy and a lot of his writing reflects that. It's known for its black humor and existential themes. So, he's authored two novels the short story collection and two memoirs.

Jim Phelan: Okay. Alright, great. [00:03:00] Well, then anything in particular about the story that you'd like our listeners to pay attention to as you read it?

Gary Weissman: Yes. I think what I'd like the listeners to think about is how they visualize the story as they hear it and how the narrative meets and also subverts their expectations and to what end it does that.

Jim Phelan: Okay. All right. Great. Now, here's Gary Weissman reading Shalom Auslander's 'Smite the Heathens, Charlie Brown'.

Gary Weissman: Okay, I'll try to do this story justice in my reading.

Jim Phelan: Okay.

Gary Weissman: 'Smite the Heathens', Charlie Brown.

CHARLIE BROWN, walking down the street.

He is wearing his baseball cap and is smiling.

He meets Linus.

Charlie Brown says , "There's something magical about the very first baseball game of the season."

Linus says, "Schulz died last night."

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

LINUS and [00:04:00] Charlie Brown, walking down the street.

Linus says, "Last night someone spray-painted a giant pumpkin on our front door."

Linus says, "This morning I prayed to the Great Pumpkin to protect us from the rioting Schulzians."

Charlie Brown asks, "How's Lucy taking it?"

Lucy strolls over.

"NEVER AGAIN!" she shouts, flipping the boys upside down.

Linus says, "Personally."

CHARLIE BROWN, sitting in his beanbag chair.

He is watching TV. Sally stands behind him.

Sally asks, "Are we Schulzian or Pumpkinite?" Charlie Brown says,"We're Schulzian."

Charlie Brown says, "Schulzians believe in a Cre ator who writes and draws us every single day ... "

Charlie Brown says, " ... while Pumpkinites, like Linus and Lucy, believe in the Great Pumpkin who flies around and [00:05:00] rewards his believers on Halloween."

Charlie Brown says, "But ultimately, belief should be a personal choice."

"Which one gets more vacation?" asks Sally.

Charlie Brown rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE BROWN and Linus, standing behind the old stone wall.

Linus ducks.

Snoopy and Woodstock stroll over. Snoopy wears a beret and carries a rifle on his shoulder. Snoopy's shirt reads: SCHULZ IS THE LORD.

Snoopy and Woodstock leave.

Linus stands up.

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

SNOOPY sits on the roof of his doghouse, facing his typewriter. Woodstock sits on Snoopy's shoul der.

Charlie Brown strolls over. Snoopy hands him a page.

Charlie Brown reads "The only final solution is to kill all the Pumpkinites as they have killed Schulz our Lord."

Charlie Brown looks up at Snoopy.

[00:06:00] "Mein Kampf," says Snoopy.

Woodstock starts shouting loudly and waving his red pen.

"Mein editor," says Snoopy.

SNOOPY sits on the roof of his doghouse, facing his typewriter.

Snoopy types "It was a dark and stormy night."

Snoopy thinks.

Snoopy thinks.

Snoopy thinks.

Snoopy writes "Because of the lousy pumpkinites."

Snoopy smiles.

Lucy holds the football for Charlie Brown.

Lucy says, "There's so much hatred and animosity in this world."

Charlie Brown runs toward the football.

Lucy says, "Maybe one day, in some distant utopian future, we can stop this hideous cycle of violence once and for all."

Lucy pulls the ball away and Charlie Brown falls flat on his back.

"That's a beautiful sentiment," says Charlie Brown.

"I'm a beautiful person," says Lucy.

[00:07:00]

Gary Weissman: Lucy leans against Schroeder's piano as Schroeder plays.

Lucy says, "Before we get married, you should know that I don't believe in Schulz. I'm devoutly Pumpkinite."

Schroeder says, "I don't believe in either Schulz or the Great Pumpkin. I believe that our purpose on Earth is an inner journey of exploration and honesty not an outward journey of conquest and domina tion."

Schroeder goes back to playing his piano.

Lucy says, "I don't believe in Schulz, either."

Schroeder rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE BROWN and Linus, standing behind the old stone wall.

Charlie Brown says, "My religion is baseball. My church is the pitcher's mound."

Charlie Brown says, "The moment a team steps onto that mystical field, all differences between them are forgotten. It is no small miracle but that for one small moment, nine different people become as one."

Snoopy strolls over to Linus. He is carrying a baseball bat over his [00:08:00] shoulder.

Snoopy smashes Linus in the head.

Charlie Brown says,"Good grief."

CHARLIE BROWN, standing outside Snoopy's jail cell.

Snoopy says, "On the contrary-I plead guilty!"

Snoopy says,"I am a soldier in the army of Schulz, and I shall proudly smite the nonbeliever wherever he may be."

Charlie Brown says, "If you plead not guilty we can be home in time for dinner."

Snoopy's ears stand straight up.

Charlie Brown and Snoopy, walking home.

Snoopy thinks Even zealots get the munchies.

Lucy and Linus, walking down the street. Linus's head is wrapped in a bandage.

They meet Charlie Brown and Snoopy.

Lucy says, "We refuse to play on a baseball team with Snoopy."

Snoopy says, "I refuse to play on a baseball team with them."

Nobody says anything.

Charlie Brown says, "Hatred is something every one can agree on."

[00:09:00]

Gary Weissman: CHARLIE BROWN, slumped down in his beanbag chair. He is watching TV. Sally stands behind him.

Charlie Brown says, "I give up. Maybe we should all just stay apart. Maybe we should all just build our walls and fences and defend them night and day with our barbed wire and guard dogs.Why should I be the only one who cares? So what if I never see or speak to another Pumpkinite for the rest of my life? What do I care?"

Sally asks, "All the Pumpkinites?"

Charlie Brown says, "All the Pumpkinites."

"Even the Little Red Haired Pumpkinites?" asks Sally.

"Aauugghh!" screams Charlie Brown.

CHARLIE BROWN, walking across the lawn.

He meets Snoopy, who carries a rifle over his shoulder and wears a T-shirt that reads WHAT WOULD SCHULZ DO?

Behind him, a small group ofWoodstocks stand in precise military formation.

Snoopy says,"Snoopy Youth."

"Good grief," says [00:10:00] Charlie Brown.

CHARLIE BROWN strolls over to Lucy. She is wearing a beret and a T-shirt that reads P.D.L.

They look at each other.

They look at each other.

They look at each other.

Lucy says,"Pumpkinish Defense League."

Charlie Brown rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE BROWN, standing on the pitcher's mound. It is pouring rain.

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

Charlie Brown pitches and asks, "What are you called when you're not sure who the Creator is ... "

POW! The ball is hit so hard that it flips Charlie Brown upside down.

He lands flat on his back.

" ... but you're pretty sure that He hates you?" Linus strolls over.

"A Chucknostic," he says.

CHARLIE BROWN, standing on the pitcher's mound. It is pouring rain.

He watches the ball as it sails over his head.

He watches the ball as it flies to the outfield.

[00:11:00] Lucy, standing in the outfield wearing her baseball hat and her P.D.L. T-shirt. She holds a tall black flag with a large orange pumpkin on it.

"Never forget, Charlie Brown!" shouts Lucy.

The ball drops right beside her.

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

SNOOPY, at bat. It is pouring rain.

Snoopy thinks, " knows the Pumpkins are behind Schulz's death! Pumpkins are behind every thing.Their secret international organization covertly influences and informs every single....

The pitch goes whizzing past.

Snoopy swings and misses.

"Strike!" calls the umpire.

Snoopy walks angrily back to the bench. Snoopy thinks: Sneaky Pumpkinites.

CHARLIE BROWN, standing on the pitcher's mound. It is pouring rain.

Charlie Brown pitches the ball.

There is a loud POW! as someone hits a homer that flips Charlie Brown upside down and [00:12:00] knocks him out of his shoes.

Charlie Brown lands on his back atop the pitcher's mound.

Linus approaches from second base and Schroeder approaches from home plate.

Linus says, "Can you believe those lousy Schulzians are going to beat us, Charlie Brown?"

Schroeder says, "I'll tell you what I believe. I believe in Man. I believe in feeling and music and art. I believe that we are all individual parts of one larger God, and that by serving one another we will ulti mately be serving ourselves."

Schroeder walks away.

"FAG!" shouts Linus.

SNOOPY, at bat. It is pouring rain.

CRACK! as he hits the ball.

Lucy runs for the ball.

Snoopy runs for the base.

Lucy runs for the ball.

Snoopy runs for the base.

CRASH! as Lucy and Snoopy violently collide.

They point at one another and shout:"NAZI!"

CHARLIE BROWN is slumped down in his beanbag chair, watching television. [00:13:00] Sally stands behind him.

The television announcer says, ''Yesterday's collision between Snoopy and Lucy only increased tension between the rival religious sects."

Charlie Brown says, "Some people say that sports are nothing more than a tool of the government to distract us from the pain of our miserable lives."

The television announcer says, "The National Guard has been deployed as widespread rioting continues across town."

"Wanna have a catch?" asks Sally.

Charlie Brown and Sally run out the door.

Lucy sits glumly on her couch, her foot in a cast.

Snoopy lies glumly on his doghouse, his nose in a splint.

Linus sits glumly in his security blanket, his head wrapped in a bandage.

Charlie Brown stands glumly behind the old stone wall.

Nobody strolls over.

Nobody strolls over.

Nobody strolls over.

"Good grief," says Charlie Brown.

Jim Phelan: Okay, Gary, [00:14:00] thanks. So, a lot to dive into here, and I think maybe we should start with the effect that Auslander is playing off of Schultz.

And, you know, the title itself invites those comparisons between the comic strip and the short story, and then many elements of the story invite further comparisons. So, what would, what are your initial responses, just maybe to get us started?

Gary Weissman: Well, Auslander working with a very limited or constrained set of narrative elements, so seven characters.

Jim Phelan: Mm-hmm.

Gary Weissman: From the strip. The stories written, it's broken up into a very short series of sections, there are 21 of them.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Gary Weissman: And so, I think of them as 21, like, comic strips.

Jim Phelan: Okay.

Gary Weissman: And some of them I can visualize, the longer ones I think of as like Sunday comics with more panels,

with a...

Jim Phelan: Yeah, just on the visualization thing, I mean, the opening sentences [00:15:00] so often are like a description of, of what you know, you'd see in the visual, right? Charlie Brown standing or Snoopy at the bat, something like that. It's like, it's just describing a panel and inviting the kind of visualization that you were talking about, you know, before you read the story.

Gary Weissman: Right. So, it's Charlie Brown walking down the street, not Charlie Brown walks down the street, right, it's not, it, it's like a still image.

Jim Phelan: Yeah,

yeah.

Gary Weissman: But you just picture like a still picture.

Jim Phelan: Right. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And so, there are a set number of sort of locations. So, the stone wall, the beanbag, chair while he is watching television.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: The pitcher's mound. It's raining because it's often raining in baseball and Charlie Brown, a nd then scenarios that Lucy with the football.

Jim Phelan: Right.

Gary Weissman: So, but and then also the need to have things end with a punchline, and often that punchline is good grief.

So, we also have certain words that have to appear, right? 'Cause they're [00:16:00] canonical

to Charlie Brown.

Jim Phelan: Mark, Marker, yeah. Right. Characteristic, canonical things, right? Yeah.

Gary Weissman: But I'd say at the same time, the title, 'Smite the Heathens, Charlie Brown' and the emphasis on Pumpkinites references \_It's The Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown\_, the 1966 TV special, and so also there's a way that when you, when you picture this story, you could also in a way think of it more as animated than a series of panels. And then thematically, there's a lot of things from that TV special that I think it's possible that Auslander sort of honed in on and then exploited.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. All right. Good, and we can get into some of those details. So you know, I think, again, to stay with the general for now, the idea that he's, you know, taking all this element, all these elements of The Peanuts story world, and, [00:17:00] you know, giving us this story of conflict, it seems to be about belief and religion and, and so on, obviously the references to Holocaust. But you know, is, would you say that there's a, and this is an act of homage or an act of undercutting détournement, the phrase that sometimes gets used. What do you, what do you think about Auslander's attitudes towards Schultz in this material?

Gary Weissman: Right. I think that I see it as détournement, which it's like a French for rerouting or hijacking.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: That he's taking this story world and turning it on its head, but in a way that's done with love. I think his familiarity with Peanuts is evident.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And, and I, it's not done to, it's not done to, to destroy or, or make fun of Peanuts, I think, so much as to use those [00:18:00] sort of as chess pieces to tell the story he wants to tell

in a way part of it is that he is emphasizing the breakdown that occurs when us versus them thinking takes over through this world that we will already know and be familiar and have some investments in.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah.

So kinda like an efficient and and familiar way into this, these thematics of the us versus them, and then he can, tonally, right, the, the, the segments range, right? Some of them are, you go, it seems like he's going for laughs, so there seems like he's going for, you know, something much more serious and, and inviting us to reflect on this us versus them. And it's, even if, you know, affecting these characters whom we've, you know, known this other context and, and have a certain kind of affection for and see them turning on each other, that becomes,

you [00:19:00] know, it was a pretty, I, it seems to me a pretty effective device for getting at that us versus them, and its consequences.

Gary Weissman: Right, and the, the trigger for that in the story is the death of Schultz, which in reality occurred in 2000, right, this story's written a handful of years later. And so it's the loss of this sort of element that provided a sense of the whole world.

Jim Phelan: The stability and coherence and things like that's loss, all right, so, so what do we do after the death of the creator of this world, right?

Gary Weissman: Yeah. It's this metaleptic moment.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Right.

Gary Weissman: Where Linus says, Schultz died last night.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: There's no real way to make sense of like how Linus would know this, right?

Jim Phelan: Right.

Gary Weissman: Except, but I also see the story as, the form it takes, which is written as existing because Schultz is no longer there to draw.

Jim Phelan: Okay. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: To draw them. Yeah. And so this is sort [00:20:00] of like Peanuts existing as, as pure thought.

It's platonic peanuts except with an a negative sense.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Right. The big absence. Right. We don't have, we don't have the visual, right, we can only have the, the invitation of the visual.

Gary Weissman: Yeah, we, we provide the visual to the extent that we are visual listeners or readers.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. And he prompts us of some of the ways, like we were talking about with the, the first sentences.

Yeah. So I think this, this issue of adaptation also bleeds into the issue of intertextuality, right. So, you know, you're talking about the references, the comic strip references to the animated television shows, and then obviously we have, you know, phrase that we have the, you know, title of Hitler's book \_Mein Kampf\_.

We have, you know, phrases never again, never forget and so on, and so we're thinking about us versus them, obviously then we're thinking about the Nazis, the final [00:21:00] solution I think even comes up as a phrase. You know, so what about that? And, and especially in relationship to this kind of treatment, you know, the comics and even the, the joking of some of the segments.

Gary Weissman: Right.

I think that well, there's a, there's a play between Jews, Christians, and Nazis, and who's playing what part continually shifts so that it doesn't make a clear allegory. This, at times, this could be read as Christian persecution of Jews or as inter fighting between Jewish sects, right?

Jim Phelan: Uhhuh, Uhhuh.

Gary Weissman: And I think that Auslander pulls away more and is just thinking about human beings forming us and them thinking, right, that, that, that kind of thinking I think is part of fascist politics.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: But I think what he's stressing is that it's also part of religion.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: [00:22:00] And so he's pushing those fascist politics and religion together in this

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Yeah, I mean, and then so, so like, I'd be interested in your thoughts on this. Like, if you set up something like that as an author, you can sort of, you know, tilt the playing field, like you can take sides, right? The Schultzians versus Pumpkinites or whatever the us versus them are that you choose, right? Do you feel like Auslander takes sides?

Gary Weissman: I think he's, I think he's a, a Chucknostic, like...

Jim Phelan: Good. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: I think it's it, it's sort of like a belief that, or, or Schroeder too I think is sort of something that he'd more sympathize with, right, I think it's just the, any orthodoxy or any belief that allows you to define an other and then mistreat them...

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: Is what he's, against. And I think in, you know it, [00:23:00] yeah, times groups are, are identified with Nazis, at times with the Jewish Defense League, at times with zealots, who are another like Jewish sect, but I think those keep shifting, and also that the readiness with which people call their enemies Nazis, I think is part of what, of this as well.

Jim Phelan: What he's sending up a little bit. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And like, so if he, if he does have a spokesperson in there, maybe a Schroeder. Do you think that's gone too far or?

Gary Weissman: I think that, I think that ultimately slender is more profane than Schroeder, right?

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Yeah. Okay. Right.

Gary Weissman: So I think there's a kind of way that Schroeder's earnestness is one too, and yeah, certainty is also probably something that Auslander would shrink away from. But that's my, just my sense.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Yeah. No, I think that's good. Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: I n the peanut specials and, and in the strips as well, but I think they find their, their greatest articulation in the animated [00:24:00] TV specials, there's the earnest figure who like speaks truth and cuts to the heart of things, and then there's a someone who believes something that they shouldn't and that they believe it, her extreme often like Lucy, so in the, \_It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown,\_ Linus has the, this ha has this extremist belief system in the great pumpkin and, that puts him at odds with everybody else.

And in that special, there's a couple passages that I thought really resonate with the, with Lander's story. Charlie Brown says to Linus, at one point, "You must be crazy, when are you going to stop believing in something that isn't true?" And Linus says, "When you stop believing in that fellow with a red suit and white beard, who goes, ho, ho, ho."

And then Charlie Brown says, "We are obviously separated by denominational differences." And then a little bit after that, Lucy threatens Linus, she's very upset because [00:25:00] being Linus sister, she's getting flack for, for him, believing in the great pumpkin.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And, and threatens to beat up Linus if he doesn't drop it.

And Linus says, "There are three things I learned to never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin." So, I think something that's really striking to me is this special is 1966, the year before was the first Charlie Brown animated special, \_A Charlie Brown Christmas\_.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And in that, Linus has the position that Schroeder has in Auslander's story.

He's the truth teller.

Jim Phelan: Okay.

Gary Weissman: And, and at one point, Charlie Brown, is like good grief, what is Christmas all about? And Linus steps forward, the spotlight goes on him, he drops his blanket and he recites from the gospel of Luke, the passage about the angel telling the shepherds about the birth of Jesus, and that's what Christmas is about. That did not stop Schultz a year later from writing this TV special where it's as if Linus never [00:26:00] believed in, well, it's really Santa Claus he doesn't believe in, but here there's also no sense of that he believes in christianity, right? Like, or, yeah. Yeah, yeah. So so those are shifting

Jim Phelan: Right.

Right. Yeah. Okay. So, and there's something about Schultz there doesn't want to get pinned down in that way, or he, in terms of the specifics of a creator.

Or, yeah.

Gary Weissman: The characters serve his, his story needs and change as necessary to do that. Although, they have, usually personality traits that are fairly consistent.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, so, so how, I mean, like, Auslander taking on those characters and their traits, you feel like, I mean some things', obviously Charlie Brown, good grief, but somebody like Snoopy in this story. Is this, is he recognizable as Schultz's Snoopy, or has it become somebody different or...?

Gary Weissman: Right. I think that Snoopy, Snoopy's really complicated in the strip because some strips [00:27:00] will, will actually show what he's imagining.

To the best of my knowledge, he doesn't speak to people in the strip.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, okay.

Gary Weissman: Like, his dialogue will be thoughts. Yeah Maybe to Woodstock he does, I'd have to go and look, but in this story, Snoopy, at some points, what he's thinking is not put in quotation marks. I mean, you, you really pointed this out to me when we spoke earlier and in other, but then later in the story, it, it is in quotation mark. So again, as it becomes necessary, you know, Auslander departs from the strict employment of, of that Schultz has set, but it's necessary for the story.

Jim Phelan: He's also the sort of the most violent of the Schultzians, right, and there's a kind of aggression and, you know, he hurled an epithet at Lucy and all that. And I mean that. Mm-hmm. That's like if you asked a child reader of Peanuts, what do you think of Snoopy, right, that, that [00:28:00] wouldn't be where the kinds of answers you'd get, oh, Snoopy is this aggressive, violent, you know, dog, he is a, you know, he's a dog we love, we love dogs and we love Snoopy, right? So, but he's also, I think in Schultz, he has a, a whole range of traits, right? And so in a way, maybe Auslander is sort of extending that aspect of Schultz's characterization, you know, that, that Snoopy's a little bit of a, to use another animal metaphor, a little bit of a chameleon, right?

He has multiple traits and they don't all hang together and so on.

Gary Weissman: Right. But he, when he plays different parts like Joe Cool or the World War I Flying Ace, he plays it hard, like he takes it all the way.

Jim Phelan: That's true, right, right. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And in the strip, I can remember strips where he'll bite on Linus blanket and then spin Linus around until he goes flying.

I think it makes, yeah, he's sort of like the Harpo Marx of the strip like he goes the [00:29:00] furthest, so to me it makes sense that he plays that part.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: It also somehow cushions the violence; if it was two human characters in this story when hitting another with a bat, it doesn't have the cartoonish aspect when it's, it's Snoopy doing it.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. No, that makes sense. Good. It makes a lot of sense, I think. Yeah. All right, well, maybe we could turn to a little bit more fine-grained narratological analysis. So

you know, we then take a look at some of the segments, right? We talked already about the general pattern of working with the comic strip as a, as a sort of basis of structuring the segments, but why don't we take a look at a few. So maybe, well, we could start with number eight, which is, Lucy leans against Schroder's piano, Schroeder makes his statement.

I don't, you know, Lucy says, oh, you should know, I'm devoutly Pumpkinite, Schroder says, I don't believe in either Schultz or the Great Pumpkin, and he gives one [00:30:00] of these, you know, nomic statements.

Gary Weissman: Mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: I believe our purpose on earth is an inner journey of exploration and honesty, not an outward journey of conquest and domination.

Lucy says, I don't believe in Schultz either. Schroder rolls his eyes. So, you know, what do you make of, of the sort of the progression there?

Gary Weissman: To me, that strip site is maybe the truest to the comic, where it is making fun of, or, or winking at human foible, so that Lucy is just hearing what she wants to hear.

Jim Phelan: Right. Right.

Gary Weissman: And I think it's also the truest to the way that they act in, in the strip where Schroeder is often, I mean, his response to Lucy is to speak these sort of broad, yeah, general truths, right, and not really engage her personally, in a way.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: And then she's constantly [00:31:00] trying to create more of a personal connection with him, which he resists, and so I think the joke there is people hear what they wanna hear, they screen out the rest, and that's true whether or not it's in the, the situation they're in. And that I mean, it's a less harsh message than us versus them thinking leads to violence.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: But I, I think the ending Schroeder rolls his eyes, speaks to the way that the strip, without really breaking the fourth wall approaches it, 'cause it's,

really addressed to the reader. Well, Laura and Hardy the, the look at the camera there.

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: Like, can you believe what this goofballs doing? And so I think Schultz will often end his strips with that kind of like, good grief, eye rolling moment, which isn't like a punchline of dialogue, right? It's a punchline of responding to a previous line of dialogue, and that's very Peanuts.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. Good, good. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, there's [00:32:00] just something about, about Lucy's you know, the choosing to believe, right? And the, yeah, and the whole mischaracterization of what he's saying.

And yeah, we are, you know, we are aligned, she says, you know, basically, you know, you and I both don't believe in Schultz. And that's, that's not what I was saying. There's always something about, well, what it's like to argue or with Lucy, right,

what can you do? But mm-hmm. After a while, but roll your eyes.

Gary Weissman: I mean, funnily enough, when we were thinking about which, which sort of part of the story you talk about we both gravitated to that first. Yeah. I think it shows. Aand Range Uhhuh, he had to create these scenarios that were panel like and let ended with a joke.

And and this is just a lot softer Yeah. More nuanced. Yeah. Right. More psychologically interesting. Right.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. Yeah. You could trust this as something where Lucy and Snoopy end up, you know, [00:33:00] calling each other Nazis. It's, yeah. It's, it's a totally different feel. Yeah. All right. Yeah. Another one we, we picked out was the number 12 with Charlie and in the beanbag watching tv, Sally, and again, we have, and Charlie in a way in the, the Schreder role making a generalization.

In any case you know, maybe we should all just build our wolves and fences, defend them night and day. With Barb barbed wire and guard dogs, why should I be the only one who cares? So what if I never see or speak to another pumpkin knight for the rest of my life?

Gary Weissman: Mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: And then Sally asks about, well, even the little red haired, pumpkin, pumpkin knights and Charlie screams.

Ah, so so what about the humor here? I mean, obviously this one is more of a. Sort of, you know, if we have we, or it's maybe another way to talk about, it's in both the previous one. In this one we have the, [00:34:00] the general statement, and then it gets undercut. Mm-hmm. Right. By the later dialogue. But it's a different kind of undercutting in different kinds of effects.

What are your thoughts about this one?

Gary Weissman: You drew my attention to. The, the existence in the story of these moments of these longer NOC statements Yeah. Where someone's trying to make sense of the world. Yeah. I think that the difference between Schroeder and Charlie Brown, who are, I think maybe the only two people who have those moments, if I'm correct yes,

Jim Phelan: I think that's right,

Gary Weissman: is that Schroeder has certainty.

Yeah. And Charlie Brown constantly ha has uncertainty. Yeah. But owns it. I think that's sort of why people love Charlie Brown. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's good. And so all of his statements are maybe this, maybe that or or the an or the questions. The questions. Right, right. And so there's something about this, this section that's sort of like the section with.

Snoopy saying in court and or saying [00:35:00] like, I, I, I, guilty, I did this, and then Charlie Brown. Yeah. Saying, yeah, but if. You know, we can go eat if you let this go. You say

Jim Phelan: if you

plead not guilty. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: So in here it's, it's like Charlie Brown thinks I'm gonna embrace this thing. And it's like, but what about little, the little red-haired girl, right?

Who's the girl he has like a crush on throughout the strip and who you never see, right? Right. And right. And so I think it's just any attempt he has to sort of just settle something Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Stabilize or something. Right. It's gonna get unstable then back to the uncertainty. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: Yeah. And his effort.

There. It, it is almost like he's not searching for truth. Right. He's, he gives up, he gives up some search for, and he is just like, let me just go with this. Right. This will make things easy. Yeah. And, and nothing will make things easy.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And again, I think also it's the fact that it's love or a crush anyway, that disrupts it.

Right. As a sort of counter to the, you know, the us [00:36:00] versus them and, and even his own. His own. You know, what if I. I never see a pumpkin night for the rest of my life. It's sort of closing off and the what the little redhead girl represents is, you know, the opposite of that or his, his desire. I don't want to go too far there, but, but you know, it's, there is a counter there.

I think. That's interesting. Right. And maybe the prognostic one, I think you wanted to talk about.

Gary Weissman: Oh, mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. So here's Charlie on the pitcher's mound again, it's this kind of thing. Charlie asking question, what are you called when you're not sure who the creator is? And in the middle of that, he's, the ball gets hit back at him.

He's flipped upside down. Lands on his back, finishes the question, but you're pretty sure he hates you. And Linus comes up with the answer. Mm-hmm. You are, you're called a agnostic.

Gary Weissman: Yeah. That, that resonates [00:37:00] with the previous section we looked at where Charlie Brand is still asking questions.

Right. Right. Trying to make thing sense of things. And I think LAN's answer is you know. Th th this, this, the agnostic is the person who who is in your position, right? Yeah. Like it's unresolvable. Yeah. And this is, this is what you are, it puts him outside of the us them

Jim Phelan: Yeah.

Gary Weissman: Opposition in a way that's, that's really interesting.

And sort of also makes it so he's her. Main focal character as in the, the Strip right. He's the, he's trying to negotiate Right. This thing that, that can't really be negotiated Yeah. Satisfactorily.

Jim Phelan: Right. But unlike an agnostic who can just be neutral mm-hmm. The, the creator er treats chuck in a way so that he ends up flat on his back or otherwise, you know, [00:38:00] he's.

He's, he's gonna be in this question of be in this position of questioning, but he's also questioning partly because he's, you know, life comes at him hard in a way, you know, he ends up on a flat on his back, or, you know, Lucy, you know, he continues to hope and, and he ends up flat on his back. Lucy pulls a football, you know, et cetera, even while talking about what a, what a beautiful person she is.

Gary Weissman: Yeah. Yeah. That's the one thing he can count on is that. He, he's gonna be the loser. Yeah. He's gonna be the one that gets hit hard. Yeah. It reminds me, I, in, I think in one of the animated specialists, Lucy says to him, of all the Charlie Browns in the world, you're the Charlie Brownies. And so being Charlie Brown E is like being a gnostic.

Yeah,

Jim Phelan: exactly. Good. Okay. All right. And then maybe we take a look at the ending. The last few. So that, that does include the one where Snoopy [00:39:00] and Lucy violently collide and point out one another and shout Zy, and now that one, right? So if we talk about punchlines, right? That punchline is really different from. The others in a sense, it's not going for any kind of humor or mm-hmm. You know, irony or something like that.

It's just like, this is what the US versus them can lead to. Right. And each one, you know, the violent collision. Mm-hmm. There's no winner and, and each one thinks this about the other. You know, and again, if we're thinking about he's Alexander coming to the end, right? It's good that he doesn't end here, I think, or, or, you know, we could imagine if he decided to, right.

Yeah. That would be, that would, that would, you know, create a whole different effect than making it [00:40:00] having two more to go. Right. Yeah. Any further thoughts about that one?

Gary Weissman: I think the last, I mean, I'm looking at 1, 2, 3, I think the, the last four. Yeah. Strips have depart from having actually kind of punchline.

Yeah. Endings. Yeah. So you have two Yeah. Two name calling, right? Fag and Nazi. Yeah. And then the last two we can,

Jim Phelan: yeah. Just to remind the listeners right. The one before the Nazi is. When with Linus Shouts, faggot Schroeder, after again he's got, makes one of these statements about what he believes and it's sort of idealistic.

Right. And that

Gary Weissman: one is, I mean, that one has more dimension than the ones where Lucy and Snoopy just yelled Nazi at each other. Yeah. 'cause it is part of, I mean, through that one you can get at the way that that believing in. In human solidarity and [00:41:00] music and art get critiqued from a strong man point of view as, as feminine and weak.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So you get into sort of a fascistic gendering of Yeah. Yeah. There, whereas and, and also is, is non heteronormative and so on, so Yeah. Whereas the next one to me is just sort of about the, the. The readiness with which people will just shout not Nazi at each other. Yeah. Auslander does have a piece where he writes about how he wrote something that that something like that tr he, he wrote something about how Trump is.

In some sense, worse. I'm trying to, I don't, I don't want, I don't wanna get this wrong, but somehow he said at least Hitler had a belief system. Trump has no belief system. Ah, and then people in the response to that called him either dirty Jew or Nazi. Right? And so he has this sense and he goes, well, [00:42:00] can I really be both of those things?

And then he's like, well, I don't. I think if I had a Nazi, I'd have to have a strong bel, you know, I'd have to believe in that. And I don't, so I'm, I'm just a dirty Jew. Yeah. But what kind of Jew am I? So I think that gets into just the w the way that anybody can be called a Nazi. Yeah, okay. But

Jim Phelan: yeah.

Yeah.

Gary Weissman: So do you wanna talk about the last two?

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, the. The last the penultimate one, Charlie and the beanbag. Then they're watching television with Sally behind him. Right? So one of the things that's new about this is we have a new voice where the television announcer and reporting on just states collision between Snoopy and Lucy that we just read about.

And then increased tension between the rival religious sex, then the television as continues, national guards were deployed as widespread. Writing continues across town. So suddenly, you know, it was [00:43:00] just among the characters now it seemed to become mm-hmm this bigger conflict. But then in between we get Charlie saying, some people say sports are nothing more than a tool, the government to distract us from the pain of our miserable lives.

But then, all right, so we got the widespread riot. Sally s want to have a catch. Charlie Brown and Sally run out the door. So I was just, you were saying like, it's not really a jokey punchline, but it does end and so I mean, there's interesting kinds of juxtapositions there, I think.

Gary Weissman: Right. We were talking about how different.

The story would be if you flip the last two and it ended with that and it would end on this note of hope.

Jim Phelan: Yeah, right.

Gary Weissman: I think that that section is at odds with a lot of the rest of the story, not only because, it doesn't end with a joke at sort of someone's expense, but Yeah. And, and, or even with a joke, but just [00:44:00] with a sort of valve releasing tension.

But also because it departs the most from the peanut story world. Like in the peanut story world, what happens with the kids would never be reported on television. Right. But it's sort of like, the longer things develop after Schultz death, the more they're, this world is just gonna shrink and be about itself.

Uhhuh like in peanuts, you believe this exists within a larger world that's just not shown. Yeah. Here it's just, it's just this world and it's, it's seems to be shrinking. Uhhuh, uhhuh and becoming more violently pulled together. Yeah. So, but then, and it's also this moment where they, they revert to just being children again.

That Sally and Charlie Brown are just gonna play catch and Yeah. And go outside. Right. Yeah. If the story ended, it'd be there. It'd be so different.

Jim Phelan: Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. But also that, you know, it's, it's a, there's a kind of the repudiation, what gets undercut is this idea of. [00:45:00] Sports are nothing more than a tool of government.

I mean, or, or there's a kind of doubleness there. Is that what they're doing? Are they distracting from the pain of their lives when they go have a catch? Or is there Oh, mm-hmm. Something in having a catch that's, you know, counter to that. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: Ray, I mean, that could be, I guess that could be the joke is that Charlie Brown says this thing, which is also very unlike what someone in the strip would ever say.

Right, right, right. So this is but about. You know, if sports is just a way that we avoid dealing with the pain of our lives, then when they run out to have a catch, it's not actually breaking from what's going on, but it's, yeah,

Jim Phelan: it's exemplifying.

Gary Weissman: Mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I don't wanna read though. I mean, I don't wanna, I wanna have both, I guess.

Right? It seems. All right. And then the final one, right. So we have the aftermath of. Lucy and Snoopy's Collision. And Lucy sits grimly on her couch foot in a cast. [00:46:00] Snoopy lies glumly on his dark house nose in a splint. Linus sits glumly in his security blanket, his head wrapped in a bandage.

Charlie Brown stands glumly behind the old stone wall. Mm-hmm. Nobody strolls over. Nobody. Strolls over, nobody. Strolls over good grief says Charlie Brown.

Gary Weissman: Mm-hmm.

Jim Phelan: So what did make go this way to end it?

Gary Weissman: I mean, this actually breaks with what we spoke about earlier. There are certain things I'm only noticing now for the first time.

And also when I read it out loud, I started noticing Yeah. Things I'd never seen or, or thought about before. But here it's Lucy. It's not Lucy sitting Glen on her couch, Snoopy line. It's, they're active verbs. Yes. But so I don't know if that is something, if that simply means that Lander forgot his formula or if this means something.

Yeah. That for us, but for me, I think of the, the isolation. It's like everybody's in their own [00:47:00] panel. Right? Right. And the nobody strolls over being The repetition makes me think of panels that just repeat with nothing happening in them.

Jim Phelan: Yep.

Gary Weissman: It ends. On this. Not funny, like, but mournful note. Right.

And it makes me think of something that Auslander said on a podcast about a year ago. He, he said to me, the high bar in writing. Is haha. Ouch. And he said that this haha ouch is something he sees in, in Kafka, Beckett, O'Connor, Uhhuh and that he tries to have in his own writing and he, he, this is ending with the ouch.

Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Right, right. Yeah. And and I think that the sort of the, we could go back and sort of, sort of track the tones of the good grief. You know, he uses it six or seven times at the, to end it. And it's also, I think, interesting that the first one, first segment ends with good grief, right? With this Charlie's [00:48:00] response to the news, right?

And then but, but that one is still in the context of you know c community company, right? And Linus Aite, right? And. You know, and now here we just have, as you say, everybody alone and Charlie kind of waiting, right? Mm-hmm. And nobody comes and nobody comes and nobody comes.

Gary Weissman: Yeah. I like your observation of the, the way it begins and ends with good grief.

Yeah. You could say it begins with a kind of mourning of Schultz, right? And ends with the mourning of the Schultz's story world, right? Yeah. Yeah. To an end.

Yeah.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. And also I don't imagine that slander had this in mind, but there's a, it's hard, you know, it reminds me of Hardy and, and mm-hmm.

And Tess, right? There's this line. Tess is sort of all alone and she needs help. And [00:49:00] the narrator says nobody comes because nobody does. You know, it's just like. Nobody strolls over this, this is what is what we're reduced to a hardy as world. I mean, I, I'm, I'm over reading here, but, but, but it did, it did put me in mind of, of Hardy that, that nobody strolls over the repetition.

Mm. And, and good grief. And it is, it is so mournful in that way. Yeah. Okay. Well, anything else that you'd like to touch on that we haven't really gotten to Gary?

Gary Weissman: I think they, maybe the only other thing is just that I just think about Slander's, sort of Jewish takeover of peanuts and Yeah. Okay.

And that, that peanuts, you know, this is the world of of a Charlie Brown Christmas. Right. These are not Jewish characters. Yeah. Right. Like he, he. You know, in response to some [00:50:00] criticism that his world was so white, right? He added Franklin, like this one black character, but there's no Jewish characters in peanuts.

Right? He didn't, and, and but, but in a way, slander sort of makes this world even. It's like they're Jewish, even though they're not Jewish. And it reminds me of how in, in the, article I mentioned earlier where he, he questions like, what kind of Jew am I? He, it's called the 10 types of Jew.

Which are you, which one are you? And he refers to like the Jesse Eisenberg, the Nathan Lane, the Kafka, the Amy Winehouse, the Shylock, and the the s Samson. Anyway he, and he, he also rates them like from his least favorite. To his most, his least favorite for some reasons. Jesse Heisenberg. But but anyway, but but his most favorite is the Bugs Bunny, right?

Yeah. And so you think Bugs Bunny's not Jewish.

Jim Phelan: That's a takeover too. Yeah.

Gary Weissman: But he says he, bugs Bunny is a Jew. How do I know? [00:51:00] Well, he's smart. He's from New York City and someone is always chasing him with a gun. He also has a tendency to declare war, and he doesn't like pigs. And most of all, bugs Bunny was a troublemaker.

He had a complete disdain for authority. If everyone else believes it, it's probably wrong. He questions incessantly that which others hold dear. Mm-hmm. So, I, I think I was reminded of that. 'cause it, it shows his readiness to sort of take over. Yeah. Cartoon or comic properties. Yeah. Treat them as.

Jewish in a way, but in a way that's not about Jewish, not about Judaism or Jewish belief, but Jewish sec, like a kind of secular disbelief, uhhuh or, or disbelief that's allowed within the religious belief. Right. Like to, to question. Yeah. So I guess there's multiple way. Multiple ways to look at that. But it reflects, you know, his favorite kind of Jew, if you want to go along with his thinking is this troublemaker who [00:52:00] doesn't like authority and, and questions incessantly.

And I think that, yeah. You know, char, Charlie, the gnostic is, is someone who's like that because they're back footed as opposed to like Auslander because he's aggressively that way.

Jim Phelan: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, great. Yeah, that's a, I think a good note to end on. So, thanks very much Gary. This was a lot of fun.

Gary Weissman: Thank you, Jim. This was great and really enjoyable.

Jim Phelan: Okay, good. And as always, I want to thank our listeners and to say I appreciate your feedback, which you can send to us at the email address projectnarrative@osu.edu or on our Twitter/X account, which is @PNOhioState.

And I want to remind you, you can find more than 40 additional episodes of the podcast at the project narrative website or on Apple Podcasts, and if you do listen on Apple, I invite you to rate and review us. Thank you again for [00:53:00] listening.