

Books at the Center: Dorothy Hale, The Novel and The New Eth...

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SPEAKERS

Dorothy Hale, Casey Wayne Patterson, Alex Woloch, Margaret Cohen, Nancy Ruttenburg



Casey Wayne Patterson 00:06

Welcome, and thanks for joining us in this episode of Cafe, the Stanford Center for the Study of the Novel podcast. In this installment, our host Margaret Cohen is joined by Nancy Ruttenburg, Alex Woloch and Dorothy Hale for a discussion of Dorothy's recent book, *The Novel and the New Ethics*. Dorothy Hale is a professor of English literature at the University of California Berkeley, and is the author of *Social Formalism*, which is an expansive study of the history of the novel, which *The Novel and the New Ethics* then builds upon. Alex Woloch and Nancy Ruttenburg are professors of English literature here at Stanford. Alex is the author of *The One versus the Many*, and *Or Orwell*, both of which join Dorothy's in productive conversation about the novel form. And Nancy is the author of *Democratic Personality* and of *Dostoyevsky's Democracy*, and she is completing another book called *The Hidden Diaspora*. This conversation was recorded on January 15 2021, following a Center for the Study of the Novel event. We're thrilled to be sharing this conversation with you, so thank you again, for listening in, as we scholars have a friendly chat among ourselves.



Margaret Cohen 01:30

Thank you so much for joining us at the center. You mentioned that this was the first conversation you've had about the book since it was published. Were there any comments

that emerged that were surprises to you?

D

Dorothy Hale 01:46

Let me first just say that I feel that I couldn't have had a better conversation about the book. The first one may be the ultimate conversation. And I really it was just thrilling to to get Alex and Nancy's response and to have the energy from that audience. So really, very profound moment for me. So thank you for that. I guess one, one thing that's on my mind that Alex mentioned at the end of his remarks--at least I that wrote down--"what about the 19th century novel?" And given that we have an expert in the 19th-- well, two experts? I would love to hear both of you. Actually, I was going to direct it toward Alex, but of course, Margaret, I'd love to hear your ideas. Because again, just to repeat, you know, what I've been arguing is that something new happens, the new, you know, the novel and the new ethics, something new happens in the modernists' moment where an idea of the art of the novel and therefore also, an idea of an ethics of form comes into systematic, you know, being. And you know, as much as I'd love to read in the 19th and 18th century novel, you know, I would love to hear what you two experts think about that claim and whether you would challenge it or support it or look for counter examples.

A

Alex Woloch 03:09

Well, maybe I'll jump in. Yeah, I was thinking about that, as you were talking, and I was kind of running test cases, through my mind, you know, and I have to say that the the novel that I thought of that is kind of the Jamesian equivalent for a much earlier moment of the novel is Madame de Lafayette's *Cleves*, which is very much a novel about the opacity of the other. And then I was thinking, as you were talking, well, does that really matter? I mean, this is just the claim of the new matter, or are you pointing to something which is just integral to the novel as a genre, which is an aesthetics of ethics? And does it change it to say that Lafayette is doing this in court society of the 17th century? And I guess where I came down, as you were talking, I was thinking about it is yes, it does really matter, because we think about this notion of ethics as a liberal humanist notion. And yet, if Lafayette really is creating in her inscrutable princess and her entry into the princess's character in the ethical choices that she has to make about how to balance her love for Nemours with her duty to her family, to her rank, and the extent to which that's part of the whole complex of aristocratic society. If that actually predates bourgeois individualism, then what does that tell us about the novel and what does it tell us about ethics? So that's where I would go into that question.

M

Margaret Cohen 05:01

The funny thing to me is that, because I was a reader for the book in Stanford Press, this is my second go around. And it just felt a little funny that I didn't really--like, I definitely noticed the question of the 19th century. And I was kind of interested, like, I was interested to hear how you would weigh in on it, but I didn't internalize it. And I didn't actually like sit down and really think through how I felt about that. I think my general inclination was like, in a certain sense, a 19th century novel would pose a problem in one of two ways. If it's not, if it has nothing to do with the tradition you're talking about, then, then that would sort of reduce the scope and the claim, I think, but if it's already doing everything you're talking about, then it would sort of like challenge the the centrality of Henry James right. So I think I would tend to think that a lot of what you're talking about is going on. Already. So before, before Henry James, it's, it feels like your book generates so easily these like, "Well, what about this?" Or "what about that?" "What about-" all the things you don't talk about? And in the way that a certain kind of strong criticism does. Like it's it's a classic instance of like, no, no good deed goes unpunished. Because like, if you've proven the case with your material, then it's like, well, what about what about 19th century American literature? What about the Victorian novel? But also, what about all--what about--I mean, I just put all the "What abouts", some of the key ones that I could think of on the table, it's "what about the French contemporary novel," or all the world, like world, the world novel outside of the Anglo American tradition? What about other media? So film? Like, is there any, like other other forms of representations to put it that way. Or even short the short story? And then, but I think, to my mind, the key one was like this--well to two other two other things. Henry James is so, it's so, he's so elevated in this tradition. And I mean, you do talk about Woolf, but not nearly as much there's like no one else can occupy that central role. So are there any, any, basically are there other counter traditions? Are there other, and you sort of in the preface now, you do say, you sort of say there probably are, but you're not, you're not going to get too involved with them one way or the other. I would think for me, that's the, that would be the question. That's the most interesting, more interesting than 19th century, actually, it's like, are there really other novels like 20th century and 21st century novel aesthetics? I mean, the two that I thought of were basically: cultivation of the self, is there some version of like, self cultivation, like where it's really about the refinement of who we are through a novel. And then some embrace of collectivity, like representation of totality, of the collective, of...I was curious if you had any interest in like, a really strong counter example, either, just like, you know, and, and I can totally understand why you didn't--I think you were careful to not get too caught up in such questions. There's a hell of a lot to talk about with the, with the work with the tradition. And, and, and, you know, the key players and what you're looking at so, so I think I ducked the question about the 19th century a little bit, but...

D

Dorothy Hale 08:19

Well, and and so...Nancy, did, did you want to say something about the American tradition? You know, 19th century tradition, tradition that that you had thoughts about? Or?

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 08:30

Well, yeah, I mean, it is the case that reading the book all along, I was thinking, "Oh, but can I think of, can I think of something that doesn't fall into this?" And I'm thinking it as kind of, "is there something that exists from it?" And that was kind of, you know, one of my questions, you know, is there any novelist, you can think of, actually, is actually aware of this in a way where they're, you know, they're writing the novel against it, they're trying to kind of escape that circularity. So I went back to the 19th century, and was interested in the 19th century American novel because, you know, the word on the street about that is that it's experimental. This is what distinguishes it. My primary example of something that's kind of, that your work kind of describes, but that it also works against--doesn't undermine it, but it's different--would be something like Moby Dick, where there's such a strong kind of ethical component to that novel. Melville is certainly focused on form. I mean, he's not just, you know, putting this grab bag of stuff into the novel. He's, he's certainly trying to achieve an effect through form and I think a novelistic ethics of alterity through form. But on the other hand, it this kind of goes back to my question about the body is that the main thing going on is that you have this absolutely tragic but inevitable failure, this kind of total failure of that ethics because of the body of the whale, which has inspired Ahab to kind of hammer against that body, And, and just absolutely kill the whale or be killed. There's nothing in between. And yet that need for that kind of encounter is so intense, and then so tragic at the end. So it seemed in all these ways, certainly pre bourgeois, or possibly even not at all interested in bourgeois subjectivity. And yet, you know, seems so germane. And also so other to this tradition.

D

Dorothy Hale 10:45

Very rich questions, so let me see if I can do justice to them. So first of all, Alex, can I point out that your question was about the one in the many? [laughter]

A

Alex Woloch 10:56

Yeah, that's true.

D

Dorothy Hale 10:57

Is there a tradition of the self? Or is there a tradition of the collectivity? So I wonder why

those occurred to you.

A

Alex Woloch 11:05

I was not aware of that, but...

D

Dorothy Hale 11:10

Um, so um, so I guess I guess I want to say two things. First, so one would be about the issue of form. And this might relate Margaret's example of the Princess of Cleves, and Nancy's example of Moby Dick. Because my, my, the distinction that I had wanted to draw in my book, is that the representation of character is an ethical issue from time immemorial, you know, as I said, with Plato, and then I have a little bit of in my book that that was really fun for me to find where Trollop and Thackeray are talking about being taken over by their characters. So you know that that part isn't really news, it seems to me and Alex, as you were saying, I hope that it strengthens the claim that I'm making for the tradition, I'm interested in to see that this has been of interest, you know, concern for novelists right from the very beginning, is that they feel invaded by characters or that they're, they're wanting to commune with the characters. So self and other you know, Margaret, as you were talking about at the enigma of the of the subject, or you know, there's a whole variety, the the example that came to my mind when I was writing the book was, you know, Pamela, but she couldn't be more different than Samuel Richardson. But I believe, correct me if I'm wrong from the research that I did, nobody complained when he wrote that book that he didn't have the right to, to to represent Pamela, they complained about a lot of other things. Which is why he wrote Clarissa, but but nobody said, Samuel Richardson, you do not have a right, you're violating the, you know, integrity and the otherness of Pamela by speaking for her right. On the contrary, he was trying to cultivate ways of autonomy effects that would render her subjectivity. So the point that I'm trying to make is that the problem of character invites these issues in the novel from the very beginning, in a particular way. But what's different is, and if we take Moby Dick as an example, Nancy, you know, no, no question like, like George Eliot, Melville's a master of form. But the question that I would occur to me to ask is: but did he think the novel was a certain thing that he was writing, and that it should be written according to certain values that were specifiable and that he could, you know, claim, so the example that I would have in mind, you know, that that I've taught in a class that I teach, called "The the Novel is a Book of Other People" is The Blithedale Romance, which seems to me, by Hawthorne, you know, really concerned with this problem of self and other and the degree of representation and even inventing a symbolics of, rather than a realist, you know, breaking the realist frame, to use a symbolics of representation, and then ironizing all that on top of it. But again, it's interesting to me that Hawthorne thought of that as a romance

structure. And he looks back to you know, he has a whole theory of romance that we know about. So there wasn't, there, there was this tendency, in, in, in these in the novels that I know about to care about these concerns, but then nobody, you know, sort of stopped and said, "okay, the novel should be this one thing, and we're, you know, we can constrain the novel, and it can come into focus as a high art form. If we if we can say that form needs to match content in a systematic way."

M

Margaret Cohen 14:45

What about Tolstoy? And Dostoevsky? I mean, I don't know if I'm one of them. I feel like just randomly throwing that in but another level it feels like it's addressing some of what you were just saying, Yeah, there's more than, because I, I was following, was following what you're saying about Blithedale. And that makes a lot of sense. It's it feels harder with Tolstoy definitely, and Dostoevsky, to say that they're not kind of, I don't know, pretty attached to an ambitious about like novelistic form.

D

Dorothy Hale 15:15

So, so again, maybe, like I would see, you know, interestingly, Tolstoy in particular, and not so much just Dostoevsky, but Tolstoy is one of the big examples that gets, you know, imported into the Jamesian tradition through Lubbock. You know, he has a whole whole big chapter on on Tolstoy as well. And, of course, the wonderful moment in Anna Karenina, when he's giving, you know, a point of view of the dog, which I'm sure is on Coetzee's mind in Elizabeth Costello, when John, the character, says, "My mother has been a dog," you know that that's got to be an allusion to Tolstoy. So there's definitely, I would put Tolstoy and Eliot in that same pre modernists world of perspectivalism that James inherits and and in Eliot's case is actually trying to refine, but um, did, did Tolstoy then theorize and aesthetics of, of the novel as a genre as an art form out of that?

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 16:16

You know, I mean, that's a really big question, because it, and this kind of goes back to my thinking about Melville too, you know, the fact just to go back to Melville for for a minute, it's, you can see him through the course of his novel writing, grappling with the form, and feeling that he failed from step to step. So he tries to write fairly traditional narratives with Typee and Omoo, has a total breakdown with Mardi and writes something that's just kind of not recognizable, as anything. I mean, it's long, and it's kind of elaborated, but it seems to be a failure, let's just say that as a shortcut. And then and then by the time he comes to Moby Dick, it seems clear to me that he has an enormous, an enormous kind of ethical project. And it does have to do very deeply with otherness. And you know, the

context of that, I think, and this, we probably can't pursue, but it, I think it comes out of the, you know, historical environment at the time. And this, you know, you've you've got this conformity on the one hand, big problem, and you have this focus on individuality on the other hand, and this becomes along with all the political and social problems, this just becomes something that I think American writers, to speak very generally of that time, are--have to come to terms with. So then you have Melville producing this formally--to call it experimental is probably an understatement--I think that that project of alterity, and one's ethical relationship to that is absolutely at the core of Melville's writing. And you can see him not fumbling for the form because formally, it's just, you know, such a massive work. But it seems to me, at the very least kind of a preview. And certainly, I mean, I would say, it's very hard for me to connect Melville to James, to understand how, you know how the influence would work if you went in the other direction, but he just seems to me at the very least a kind of interesting predecessor to him, because the elements that the intense the mission to find a novelistic aesthetics out of almost the fragments of it, he just, you know, blows the novel apart to find those fragments in the way he reassembles them a kind of an aesthetic that would match the ethical intensity of that novel. And I think the reason that it's, you know, in such a problematic novel for people, it's either because they succeed, that they can feel this, or to them, it's just an absolute mess.

D

Dorothy Hale 19:08

Well, and I and also think, again, to think of the Melville on the one hand, Moby Dick on the one hand and Middlemarch on the other, I, that's really productive for me, because, again, from James's point of view, he would call I think, there's no statement about this, I think, I think he would call Moby Dick, a baggy monster, right, which is his term for the form, what he believed was the formlessness. And then with Elliot, he feels that she lacks, he says in reviews, an aesthetic sense in particular, you know, you can see what starts bothering him about how social traces emerge as problems of form because what he doesn't like about Elliot, and frankly, what a lot of people still don't like about Elliot, is the chatty narrator. But on ethical grounds, it seems like the narrator is taking up too much room from that characters and can't control herself and very--all of this diagnosis of the narrator starts taking place as an excrescence and an invasion of her characters rather than realizing them in their autonomy and individuality. So, you know, again, the with, with Melville, representing this experimental, as you say, innovative form that might have almost come in, you know, the late 20th century. And the modernist period, pursuing those those values, but, but again, I think, again, it's the systematization of the narrative techniques or bringing them into visibility and, and reckoning with them and identifying them, that might be the difference between the past and the present.

M

Margaret Cohen 20:41

I was trying to before we met to find the passage of the introduction, where you talk about Proust and you say, I'm not going to go in this direction, you know, and talk about the way in which are all these different perspectives are kind of emanations of the narrator. And I guess also, I would throw in there narratives of the imagination, which are highly crafted and highly concerned with form and with the form of the novel, but which are very unruly and recalcitrant. And so I wondered if you could just elaborate a little bit more on Proust, if you want, or on this potential, you know, for using that novel, or whatever it is, you know, speaking of loose, baggy monsters, to open up an alternative tradition?

D

Dorothy Hale 21:35

Yeah. Well, first of all, I also just want to say I wrote the preface after I read Alex's comments on my novel--I'm sorry, my book. And I tried, as Alex had said, you know, like, what, what fits in there and what doesn't fit, fit in there. And so I feel Proust is a wonderful example of kind of a hinge figure for me. Because, without question, the remembrance of things past is about self and other. And one could argue an ethics of self and other as part of the philosophical concerns. So I'd like you know, that makes it really good for me, because that's what I've been trying to highlight our novels that thematically are about these issues as well. And certainly we can find that in Proust. What I would want to say is that I quote that one passage from *Swan's Way*, I think it is, where Proust seems to be articulating an aesthetics of a novel, the novel, and there are certain resonances with some of the attitudes that I'm investigating, but the real differences as well. And Nancy, I actually wondered if, if some of the things that Proust is saying about how he thinks novels represent character and bring readers and writers to that project, kind of resonated more with what you're saying about embodiment. So I just want to tag that for a minute. Because in the quote that I offer, in the preface, he's saying, what's really the novel's special virtue or capacity is that it dematerializes people. So he, remember he says, in real life, we only know people by a gesture or some material encounter, and there's so much more to them beyond that, and they're fleeting, these these real life encounters. But then what the novel does, as I understand that passage from Proust, is that it texture realizes everybody, I mean, that's the word that I would use, he says it dematerializes everybody. And once everybody's dematerialized, he says, there's an equality, like the Franzen thing that we talked about earlier with the gift of our imagination and emplacement, you know, then he says, through reading a novel, we can know these characters more fully, or, or wholly, and make them ours through their accessibility. One thing that really interests me about Proust is that you don't get a lot of free indirect discourse in Proust, you don't get the prolonged imaginations of another character's point of view. You know, it's all mediated through Marcel and his impressions. And him, you know. That autonomy effect

is much limited, he breaks into those dial-, dialogues, you know, forever in the middle of the thing when I start losing pace with him, you know, when they, when they have the parties, and everybody's just talking and it becomes like, to me like Ulysses with the, you know, nighttime night town scene, so that you, one could argue there are autonomy effects there, you know, just through the dialogue, but I don't see him engaging in so many of the practices that characterize the tradition that I'm looking at. So that doesn't mean that he couldn't fit into it as a really interesting kind of hinge example, but I think he wants to take us in a different direction ultimately with his idea of novelist aesthetics as being dematerialized and making selves available through fiction

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 25:00

That's really interesting, because I was wondering when when, that you pair Proust with Philip Roth of all people as offering a counter aesthetics. So I'd like to hear more about that. Because when I think about the literary tradition that you're tracing, Philip Roth seems like he would be, you know, he would be right in there with the in crowd. And so Proust, I could sort of immediately say, "Well, yeah, I can understand that." But could you talk about Roth and the way you see him as offering a counter aesthetics?

D

Dorothy Hale 25:33

I, you know, I use Roth as an example, because I feel like something like in *The Human Stain*, he's con-, you know, completely consumed with the kinds of issues that we're talking about. He also, by the way, I mentioned in my book that, in one of, I think Roth's first novel, *Letting Go*, he actually has a character who is doing his dissertation on *Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James. So I wanted to work that James connection, I thought, wow, you know, Roth should fit into this tradition. But maybe those who know Roth more deeply or, you know, I couldn't find the interest in technique. So, although I saw the thematic concerns there, I was trying to make that distinction between novelists who you know, like what we're talking about at the very beginning, who are concerned about self and other and social heterogeneity, and those who then think, oh, my goodness, this really affects me as a novelist. And I better be very, very careful about what I do formally, and have a responsibility.

A

Alex Woloch 26:36

I just wanted to pick up on like, when you said the James angle, because I feel part of the problem, why, like, I mean, while that question seems important, but there's something that seems off about them. And I think part of it is that, and I also started thinking more people Dickens, Flaubert, Austen, there's all these different figures you could think of, but

the thing is, like, to do it fairly, what I'd first have to do is like, make a case for the refraction of Proust, which I don't think would be that hard to do. But I couldn't do it, like to demonstrate sort of, like sort of inductively and empirically, all these other figures, taking up Proust in this, in an abundance of ways and like once you've shown that, then you can enter in. And I feel like that's like the specific operation you do on James to... I think you're doing a big favor to James, Jamesian scholarship, because it's such a, this book makes such, is a such a powerful reactivation of James, in a way that I think would make other scholars that work on other novels kind of envious, like one would want to be able to do that with Flaubert. And I think you probably could with any number of novelists to show to get the constellation of later writers who are inarguably dealing with this figure, it seems more like something that happens with poetry, but like one one example that popped in my mind was actually Mark Greif, his his chapter on, In Age of the Crisis of Man, where he has a great chapter on Kafka and like, Kafka, like these figures from the 40s suddenly going back to Kafka, and I think what you're doing with James isn't done that much in like history of the novel where there's... it's not just showing the refraction, it's, it's this combination of like a reading of like a very close reading of the author together with this kind of empirical survey of how other novelists are taking, taking up that author and I mean, methodologically, that just seems important, and I want and I wonder if, that would seem to be--you'd have to do, like, that would be what you would want to do with Proust or with Joyce or with George Eliot to really, that'd be the only way to actually sort of really make a strong argument that no, you're, "Dory Hale is wrong to put James at the center. Because in fact, here's another constellation with a different writer at the center that has its own strong aesthetic, right."

D

Dorothy Hale 28:50

Thank you. Thank you for that. And could I just say, that was part of the thrill of doing the research for this. Yeah. On the one hand, it was finding all the people talking about ethics, I was like, wow, you know, more and more and more kept coming into my hands. And then I kept, you know, like, found then I thought, "Okay, well, let me look at you know, these statements by novelists and I'll see if I can find this ethics of alterity earlier," and then lo and behold, I kept finding all this praise of Henry James in particular. So I just have to say, as a researcher, it was, it was, you know, so like, you know why we're in it, you're just like, "oh, evidence, I've got hard evidence here that this is the case." And then you have someone like Ford Madox Ford, beginning, you know, his discussion of Henry James, with the statement saying, you know, Henry James is the single greatest novelist ever, you know, so it isn't just the James was in there. And then you have Gish Jen saying, Henry James is of course the Bible, you know, for novel writing. So you know that the fact that that legacy is still there was very exciting for me. If you wanted to go back to Roth, I just want to say all just to finish that for a second. I just wanted to say so I felt because he

wasn't concerned with form that it was just more of a realist project. And there's nothing wrong with that. But he just wouldn't, wouldn't fit into the aesthetics of alterity. For me. I mean, as I said, as we've been discussing, I hope that once I pointed this out, and this is the distinction Alice was just trying to make, you know, the writers who are writing in this tradition, kind of full blown, but then I, you know, once I've articulated it, I think we could go back to Dickens, that was my point of using David Miller as an example, like David Miller's reading of Dickens just blows me away. And I also think Dickens had none of that in mind when he was writing. So that an aesthetic comes forward, that is very palpable and articulatable, and then you can apply it so amazingly on, on Dickens seemed to me the register of the family of ideas that I was talking about, and the utility of it, but Dickens wouldn't be an origin figure for it or know that was happening.

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 30:55

Okay. So that so that, I mean, that's very interesting. To me, Roth was a kind of great example of what you're talking about, because he's so dialogic. So I wanted, you know, this, this was I wanted to at the end of at the end of our event, Alex, you brought up the question of whether Bakhtin and Lukacs are now sort of fading into the past, and something new will come forward to replace it, namely Dory, which is a whole different way of doing novel theory. So so in way I'm thinking about that when I asked you about Roth, because, you know, he's like Dostoevsky, I think of him as a follower of Dostoevsky because his novels are dialogue. I mean, there's very little description. First person, well, you've got Nathan Zuckerman as narrator, but, you know, so you've got very dialogic novels. And then you have Bakhtin saying, "This is the novelistic form, dialogism," and then, you know, he moves to polyphony, which amplifies that, but for that reason, well, I guess the question is, you know, does, does the dialogical novel have any particular place? Do you think within this tradition?

A

Alex Woloch 32:14

Can I just kind of jump in on the just on Roth, I feel like there's a lot of who--I feel you would have more fodder just in finding Henry James and Philip Roth. If I'm remembering particularly like The Zuckerman Trilogy, I feel like Henry James is all over there. Like there's just a lot of mentions of Henry James and the master and, and, like, like Zuckerman, like learning, like reading Henry James at the University of Chicago and all that stuff. So...

D

Dorothy Hale 32:38

Okay, that's really wonderful to know. So thank you. I think I got an article there. Right. And then Nancy, just to answer, you know, to address your question about Bakhtin. And

this is where again, I was so grateful to Alex for re, remembering Social Formalism, and connecting the two projects, because, you know, certainly I would want to think of Bakhtin's theory, and then it's specific translation and entering into the critical scene, in the 80s. And in the Anglo American Academy, you know, circling back in at that particular moment, and, you know, just being caught up then by--that's what I talked about, in my in my fifth chapter, you can see something like Bakhtin being referenced by Judith Butler, as she's articulating her post structuralist idea of ethics. So, Bakhtin still remains very important to my thinking and to this tradition. So just, I mean, so the first thing I would say is that, yes, his his ideas of alterity and not only novelistic character and autonomy, the way he describes it, and Dostoevsky's poetics, but even more interesting to me, in Discourse in the Novel when he talks about language itself as being, you know, quotable, and having degrees of autonomy and materiality, that then define characterological states. Right. So that is a version of alterity right there. But what again, what it got interested, what I got interested in this, in this new project is all that Bakhtin doesn't say about the art of the novel, because where he leaves us in Discourse in the Novel is, he says that the representation of of character is the representation of language, period. That's where he ends up in Discourse in the Novel. wherever he came from, in Dostoevsky's poetics, that's where he ends up. And whenever I teach that, my students are like, you know, "what, what about plot? What about this? What about, you know, what about all these other elements of form that we take?" Where is that in Bakhtin? And so then I thought, well, you know, that there is an idea of an aesthetics or an art of the novel developing out of James that resonates with Bakhtin, but goes in a different direction. Toward arguing for the novel as a high art form, which Bakhtin does not do.

M

Margaret Cohen 34:57

He seems to me to want to, to tie the novel to the people, to the working class, to push back against what we would think of as, you know, liberal notions of sympathy and ethics. To use that to, to move to the contemporary moment, I'm wondering about your students who asked that question and whether they would have asked that 15 years ago, or whether they're the students who went through the high school curriculums that you talked about, and the extent to which, just to cut to the chase, I'm really fascinated by your claim, which seems to be true, that there is a renaissance of the novel that occurs against post structuralism against post modernism through valuing an ethics of the other or alterity. And then related to that the question of who has the right to speak for whom, and, you know, we had an incredible turnout today, we had 150 people, which I think is a record for the Center for the Study of the Novel. And your book is so timely, given the fraught political climate in the US and the question of, you know, who does have the right to represent, you know, who? Which is a literary question. And it's also a political question.

D

Dorothy Hale 36:21

Can I just say, and so again, it so interested me that we're, and Bakhtin kind of resonates with this, that we're, that we're having this debate in literature classes over fictional characters, characters who do not exist, people who do not exist, but the politics still do exist! And again, that's a complicated thing. It's not a mistake, it's not a mistake, or anything. Why is it that we bring those politics to fictional characters? What claims do we want to make about those? And I mentioned in my, in the introduction of my book that, or the first chapter that, you know, this editor who suggests you know, that that novel that society should be could be improved, a contemporary editor for a creative writing journal, if people would just, writers would diversify their novels, that he thought that that was a good thing, you know, hey, represent as many people as possible, and that'll help improve the world. And then he had a, you know, quit his job, because it was considered to be so inflammatory. So on, on the one hand, this is a live political issue that--so to get to your question about students, which I, I really welcome, I find to two kinds of responses among my students, I find, and that helped generate this book, I found definitely an assumption about identity, that the students will come into the class say, with all sorts of preconceptions about Henry James, right, he's a white male author, they have a vague sense that he's elite or rich, he never worked. He doesn't write about working people. Why should they read him? He writes about women, you know, who is he to be writing about Isabel Archer? So there're these, that's their, their critical place that they're coming from. So then when you teach something like James and show that James is actually absolutely concerned with all these same issues, that these are the thematics of his of his novels, and then also apply or freight his narrative technique, then I hope to show that, you know, these these issues of identity and the best--the power of novels to have a political or an ethical effect, that these are problems that would, that need to be thought about, rather than just immediate ideas about about subject positions and political rights. And that helps the students become more thoughtful. I mean, and they do and they're excited, and they love, they love doing it. But that that's on the one hand, on the other hand, there is just to say, a student that will come in, who has a very, what I call the Bachian idea of novelistic aesthetics, and they say, you know, "shouldn't in a good novel have..." and then the list certain formal features, that, that that's a minority of students. That's one from the creative writing workshops, you know, but then I think they see that those formal features are actually value laden. And that's one of the things I tried to show.

M

Margaret Cohen 39:13

Yeah, I think I'm going to use those arguments. Some of the questions I get about authors.

N Nancy Ruttenburg 39:20
Aren't we all!

A Alex Woloch 39:21
I think that's super interesting, like that last question and answer on politics and the contemporary moment and, and identity politics really, as a as it is implicitly surfacing at a time that's explicitly in the book. Yeah. I think another thing that Dory's book doesn't do is to try to historicize it in the sense of like, the social and economic factors that are underlying these cultural shifts and with identity politics in the US that would be, you're not trying to provide causality for this in terms of like economic or social or political factors, such as the obvious one of like the rise of multiculturalism in in the US.

D Dorothy Hale 40:07
Well, the, I, Alex, and I think this also goes back to what we were talking before about the older traditions of the novel. Because, you know, I was struck by Bakhtin and on the one hand, but also Ranciere on the other end and arguments for the novel being, let's use the term loosely, okay, a democratic form. What you know what Ranciere and other, Auerbach maybe also says this, as the novel, quote, unquote, "develops," we get different protagonists coming into visibility. And there's an equate, equation or a tendency to take subaltern or invisible groups, social groups and and give them voice, right. So we can look at Pamela and we can look at--

A Alex Woloch 40:48
Germinal or something.

D Dorothy Hale 40:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Right. And Ranciere talks about Joe Christmas and Light in August, right, like so, whenever you think you've, you've, you've never done democratising. Right. So that again, that's sort of the way I think, rather than in terms of social and historical particular moment, I kind of think more, "this is the generic, generic tradition of the novel, it's always been concerned about that." And then at a certain point, it becomes self consciously made into an aesthetic problem in terms of the protagonist set. And just the other thing I would say, though, on a positive side, so you can see this like so with this, this novel, Girl, Woman, Other that I'm writing an article about right now, because it could have been the next chapter I feel in my book, Bernadine Evaristo says very explicitly that she wrote this novel, because she wants to give voice to the diversity of Black British

women, female identity. And that is a social project, right, that she is explicitly taking on. And so who are the readers for that? Well, as many people as she can get, that she feels that she can create these characters that will change the vision of a certain social group and make it more of a protagonist rather than a subaltern group. But then all of these problems come into view for her, Everisto, about what her right is, and how to respect the differences among these women. She actually goes to typography, I mean, it looks like poetry on a page. So that was a particular formal problem that really just grabbed my attention. Like, you know, what is that doing in this new innovation, this new idea that the typography itself could somehow be engaged in the representation of otherness and this ethical project, so new forms of the novel forms were coming into view.

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 42:41

You can even see that, you know, you could extend that to graphic novels as well, really. And that's happening more and more, I think. I wanted to go back to Alex's question at the beginning about other narrative forms. But if you just take the short story, always been the outlier, I mean, it's rarely taught. It is at Stanford, in our department recently, by Gavin Jones, but it's rarely taught all by itself. But since you have the same types of narrative resources, except size maybe, does that, you know, does it make any sense because your book is about that novel, but do you see that kind of, you know, replicated in the same way or to the same degree in in short stories?

D

Dorothy Hale 43:28

I don't really read a lot of short fiction. I have other reasons for that preferences that I could specify. But I also, I don't know enough about the short story tradition to know that if, you know, who its theorists are, as it were, right? Oh, who would be their Henry James? Or maybe they're doing a version of Henry James, for all I know. So that I think as Alex was indicating earlier, if that were a project that we're interested in, I think I'd have to really start researching and find out, you know, what, is there, what are the traditions there?

M

Margaret Cohen 44:02

Just to give a shout out to a former Stanford grad student, one place to look would be Long Le-Khac, whose dissertation and now book is on what he calls "transnarrative," which is like the specific sub genre of short stories that are connected, like so they're sort of halfway between short stories and novels. And it's, it would definitely, you definitely have a lot of grist for the mill of alter--aesthetics of alterity. With his with his book.



Dorothy Hale 44:27

Yeah, you know, I'd love to look at that. Because, again, this Everisto novel, she has separate narratives that kind of intertwine, but they really are on a short story cycle. And her , one of her influences is ,is Under Milk Wood, and also Sherwood Anderson, The Story Cycle, so I could see how the novel form, you know, even though it wants to still weave these things together is in conversation with that story cycle genre for sure.



Margaret Cohen 44:54

You have a lot of grist for your mill. [laughter]



Dorothy Hale 44:57

I think there's three projects that we've assigned to you. You've got a monograph on influence, a whole thing about influence, you've got Girl Woman Other. So we've, we've, you know, and now this!



Alex Woloch 45:10

You have a lot of homework!



Dorothy Hale 45:13

And then can I also say Alex, you know when when you were reading my book and giving me comments and you pointed out you also said this in our, in the thing we just had, you said I that I refrain from actually doing hard readings, you know, of the novels that I'm more staging the issues, but I just got to tell you, I mean, you know, the other thing that I would like to write, as it were, but, you know, working on things like The Ambassadors, I would love to write a chapter, you know, just on The Ambassadors and do there what I did with Maisie, you know, so Coetzee's, you know, I could have done Waiting for the Barbarians, I could have done Disgrace. In fact, a slow start I got to the project is that I thought that I could the Coetzee chapter I was gonna do, like, five novels really, really deeply. And I thought, "Oh, my God. I'll be a hundred," you know, so. So I do feel for me, in terms of what else there is to say about it. I'd love to, I mean, not now, we're at the end. But I'd love to go deep into those novels and explain how this ethics of alterity is at stake in the thematics, as well as the specificity of the forms.



Margaret Cohen 46:23

Well I think that's a great place to end even if it gives you a lot of work to do going forward, but we all look forward that. Thank you so much for joining us, Dory Hale. Thank you, Nancy, and Alex--Nancy Ruttenburg and Alex Woloch for being part of our conversation today.



Casey Wayne Patterson 46:47

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