

Boxall podcast [final]

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SPEAKERS

Alex Sherman, Ato Quayson, Casey Wayne Patterson, Ian Duncan, Nancy Ruttenburg, Margaret Cohen, Peter Boxall, Mae Velloso-Lyon, Cynthia Vaille-Giancotti



Casey Wayne Patterson 00:06

Welcome, and thanks for joining us for our third season of Cafe, the Center for the Study of the Novel podcast. This episode, our host, Margaret Cohen is joined by Peter Boxall, professor of English at the University of Sussex, to celebrate his book *The Prosthetic Imagination: a History of the Novel as Artificial Life*, which was published with Cambridge University Press in 2020. To give responses to Peter's book, we are further joined by Ian Duncan, the Florence Green Bigsby Chair in English at the University of California Berkeley, and Nancy Ruttenburg, the William Robertson Coe Professor of American Literature at Stanford University. This episode is edited from the live recording of our virtual Books at the Center event on Friday, October 29 2021. We have the good fortune to showcase some really fantastic scholarship at the Center, which we're thrilled now to be sharing with you. Thank you for listening in on another of our warm and informal exchanges, as we scholars have a friendly chat among ourselves.



Margaret Cohen 01:14

Well, then, I think we should get started, this is our first event of the season for 21/22 Books at the Center. We're hoping to be back in person, by winter quarter, if the optimistic vision for our future prevails. I'm going to get started because there's a lot to talk about here. So today, the format is as follows. I'm going to introduce the speakers. And then Professor Boxall has prepared some remarks on Kazuo Ishiguro's "Klara and the Sun" to frame his argument in *The Prosthetic Imagination*. After that Ian Duncan will speak and then Professor Ruttenburg, and then that should leave us about 45 minutes for conversation, first speakers among themselves, and then opening up to everyone who is gathered together with us today. So let me start by introducing our guests. I'm so thrilled to have Peter Boxall with us to discuss *The Prosthetic Imagination*. Professor Boxall teaches English at the University of Sussex. And his research has focused on the relationship between aesthetics and politics in modernist and contemporary writing. And he also studies the longer history of the novel. He's got an extensive publication list and his current book concerns the 20th century novel and the decline of the West. And it's entitled *Fictions of the West*. So welcome, Professor Boxall.



Peter Boxall 02:35



Peter Boxall 02:55

Yes, thank you for that introduction, Margaret. And, and thank you, Margaret, and in and Nancy for this invitation. It's a great honor to be here at the Center, I'm very grateful to you all. And thank you for so smoothly managing this event, it's amazing how quickly we've learned how to do this. As Margaret says, I'm going to speak for a little while on Kazuo Ishiguro today as a way into a discussion of *The Prosthetic Imagination*. I'm going to share my screen as well. I finished *The Prosthetic Imagination* some time ago as these things go, and since finishing *The Prosthetic Imagination*, I've been working on a book called *Fictions of the West*, which I think follows on from *The Prosthetic Imagination* in accordance with a certain kind of logic. And I thought, I thought rather than just talking about *The Prosthetic Imagination* or introducing it, I thought I might offer a kind of reading, a quick reading of Ishiguro, his latest novel "*Klara and the Sun*," because I think it might sort of mobilize some of some of the ideas that run through *The Prosthetic Imagination*. And in my mind, at least, putting those ideas in motion in a way that allows me to point to the bridge between *The Prosthetic Imagination* and a fiction of the West. And I'm going to be thinking as I say initially about Ishiguro's 2021 novel—only came out a few months ago—and I'm going to be thinking about this novel as a prism, in a way, through which to read Ishiguro's long conversation with the novel form and to tune that conversation that Ishiguro is having with the novel with the kind of conversation I try and have with the novel in *The Prosthetic Imagination*. And I'm thinking about a particular moment which comes in a scene about three quarters of the way through the text, in which the protagonist and first person narrator makes a critical discovery about the nature of artistic representation. This discovery that Klara makes about how art works is related to various forms of artificial life. The various forms of artificial life with which Ishiguro's novel is centrally concerned. I don't know how many people have read this novel yet, so I'll sort of try and give you a sense of how it works. Klara, the protagonist, is an automaton whose sole purpose in life is to act as what is called an "artificial friend," or an AF for short, to her owner, a teenage girl named Josie. Klara is the most obvious artificial persona in this novel. But as anyone who's read the novel will know, that she belongs to a wider environment which is more generally artificial. Manufactured, simulacral, hardly really there. A very kind of absent sort of place. The children in this world, Josie being one of them, need AFs because the world of the novel, this oddly skewed, North American suburb (we don't quite know where it is, but it's in North America somewhere) this place is so absent and so technologically mediated, so artificial, for want of a better word, that there are a few places left in which young people might socialize with each other and so make what we might think of as "real" friends. Children in this world do not go to school, but are educated at home on their mobile devices. I think Ishiguro wrote this before most of our children were educated at home on mobile devices. And their education and their social life is empty, estranged, a tinny replica of what we might think of as shared life. And the children themselves are engineered, artificially enhanced, made in a laboratory. Wealthier families—the novel is very attuned to class difference—wealthier families subject their children to a form of genetic engineering, which is known as "lifting," which makes the enhanced students more readily able to learn these odd distanced lessons that are given to them by their avatar professors on their mobile devices, which are here called "oblongs." The genetically modified children learn in artificial educational environments from simulacral educators, and it's the job of a set of artificial friends like Klara to assuage the loneliness and isolation that such radically alienating social engineering produces.



Peter Boxall 06:56

So this biomedical adaptation of the children like Josie to the artificial environment of the novel comes, we soon learn, at a great cost. Being lifted does not only render these children strangely evacuated and out of focus, but it's also biologically medically dangerous. Josie had an older sister named Sal, who died, we intuit, of the procedure, and Josie herself from the beginning of the novel is seriously and possibly terminally ill, also as a side effect of the lifting process. Josie is so weak that she is more or less housebound. But despite this illness, she makes regular trips when she is well enough to the nearby city, where she visits the studio of a local artist named Mr. Capaldi, in order to sit for what we are told is a

portrait. There's something fishy about both this portrait, and about the portraitist, we're led to suspect. Something fishy, that's obscurely connected to Joe's illness, and to her artificiality. Josie's boyfriend Rick, who is the only unlifted child that we meet, is deeply suspicious of him. "This guy," Rick says, "this artist person, everything you say about him sounds well, creepy. All he seems to do," Rick says, "is take photos up close. This piece of you, that piece of you. Is that really what artists do?" Josie's housekeeper Melania, a tough talking immigrant worker of unspecified ethnicity, also expresses her distrust of Mr. Capaldi, and perhaps more plainly, that Mr. Capaldi, she says, "is one creep son bitch." Klara, confused by Melania's virulence replies, "but housekeeper, isn't Mr. Capaldi just wishing to paint Josie's portrait?" and Melania only intensifies her hostility. "Paint portrait fuck. AF you watch close, Mr. Son-Bitch, or something bad happen Miss Josie." So it's when Klara and Josie and Josie's mother and father pay a visit to Mr. Capaldi in his studio midway through the novel, that the moment I'm interested in here, that I'm offering as a prism, that this moment arrives. Klara's mother and Josie say to Mr. Capaldi when they visit him in the studio that they want to see the portrait that he's made of her. "It's kind of scary," Josie says, "but I'd like to take a peek." You can hear the kind of the nature of the language. It's very kind of flat. And unflashy. "It's kind of scary. I'd like to take a peek." Mr. Capaldi though, is a bit hesitant, a bit reluctant. "You must understand," he says, "it's still a work in progress. And it's not easy for a lay person to understand the way these things slowly take shape." Josie is forbidden to look at the portrait that Mr. Capaldi has made of her. But Klara, with Melania's emphatic instructions in her mind, breaks into the studio to see the portraits for herself. "I turned the corner of the L and saw Josie there suspended in the air. She wasn't very high, her feet were at the height of my shoulders, but because she was leaning forward, arms outstretched, fingers spread, she seemed to be frozen in the act of falling. Little beams illuminated her from various angles forbidding any refuge." And I want us to remember this, these little beams and this lack of refuge because we'll come back later. The portraits of Josie we realized that this moment isn't a portrait at all. Klara had already intuited this, she says to Mr. Capaldi and to Josie's mum. "I'd suspected for some time," Klara says, "that Mr. Capaldi's portrait wasn't a picture or a sculpture, but an AF," an automaton like Klara herself.

P

Peter Boxall 10:53

Through all of Josie's trips to sit for Mr. Capaldi as he photographed those disaggregated pieces of her that Rick found so creepy, Mr. Capaldi had not been making a mimetic representation, but rather a new prosthetic version of Josie, one that might take her place when she herself dies, as it's expected she will, a victim of her own genetic artificiality. As Mr. Capaldi says, "What you have to understand is this. The new Josie won't be an imitation, she really will be Josie, a continuation of Josie." Mr. Capaldi has made a new automaton body to replace Josie's when she dies. And he explains to Klara that she too is part of the portrait that he's making. That Klara's own real purpose, unbeknown to her until this point, is to act as a replacement or a continuation of Josie's mind, of her personality. "That Josie you saw up there," Mr. Capaldi says to Klara, "is empty." Klara must "inhabit" the word he used is "inhabit" Klara must inhabit her. "We want you to inhabit that Josie up there with everything you've learned. You're not being required simply to mimic Josie's outward behavior, you're being asked to continue her. The second Josie won't be a copy," Mr. Capaldi says to Josie's mother, "there's nothing inside Josie that's beyond the Klaras of this world to continue. She'll be the exact same and you'll have every right to love her just as you love Josie now." So this moment, I think, is the crux around which Ishiguro's novel turns, a moment which one can only begin to address by placing it in dialogue with the longer history of the novel form, as the novel itself shapes our understanding of what artificial life is. How, Ishiguro asks here, are we to find or guard the line in a fictional world between an act of imitation and an act of creation? That is, between mimesis and prosthesis, between representing a missing thing and being the thing that is missing? When Klara says in her first person narrative voice when she rounds the L in the studio, that "I saw Josie there suspended in the air," how are we to read the referring power of the name "Josie"? Do we sustain a difference within the name itself between the living child Josie and the prosthetic replacement of Josie that Mr. Capaldi has named? "I saw Josie there," Klara says and perhaps we hear her saying that the doll Josie that she saw was

so like the real Josie, such a sophisticated imitation of her, that it felt as if she was looking at Josie herself. Or do we hear in that single name Josie being used to refer at once to Josie and this imitation of her, this replacement or this continuation? The suggestion that there is no difference between the real Josie and the artificial Josie, that "Josie," in inverted commas, is artifice, is fiction pure and simple. And so the distinctions between first order and second-order versions of her collapse at the moment but her status as fiction, as an effective fiction, is revealed.

P

Peter Boxall 14:13

So that's the question and Ishiguro asks this question at this moment in *Klara and the Sun*, in order to pose, I think, a question about the nature and history of the novel form, what I've theorized in this book as the "prosthetic imagination": to place a character in a fiction in front of his or her represented likeness in order to ask whether the original or the copy has ontological primacy. This is to mobilize a critical tradition running throughout the history of the novel, often associated, although not always, with the fictional representation of portraiture that touches on the very capacity of fiction to produce what we might think of as living pictures. It's to employ a device that knows it's a device and that knows that it is a device which has been employed at every key moment in the history of the novel to anatomize the texture, and mimetic potency of that device itself. The device of a fiction which contains within it a fiction, a very well known device. As Klara stands in front of the portrait of Josie, as these different forms of artificial life confront one another under the specific technological and political conditions that determine representation in *Klara and the Sun*, we can feel Ishiguro weighing the balance in 2021 between prosthesis and mimesis, pressing at the ways in which the technological, political, and material production of the real is related to our capacity for crafting representations. And as we feel Ishiguro approaching this difficult shifting ground, we can see ranged behind this meeting between the portraits and its subjects earliest stagings of this encounter, each of which speaks in its own terms of the relation between the prosthetic and the mimetic, between life and the representation of life. Take, for example, the centrality of the painted portrait, to Thomas Pynchon's 1965 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*. This work, famously, sits at a junction in the history of prose fiction, in part because it articulates the growing revolutionary power in the mid to late 20th century of the aesthetic representation to overcome that which is represented. The novel's protagonist Pynchon's novel's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, feels herself to be ensnared in a series of interlocking representations that have no reality underpinning them, to be trapped as she sees it like a kind of Rapunzel in a simulacral tower, and the vertiginous sense that Pynchon's novel is partaking, itself, of this representational groundlessness, this interlocking series of representations within representations. This sense is concentrated in a moment in which Oedipa stands, famously again, in front of a painting which depicts other women, other Rapunzels, similarly trapped in their own towers. The painting, "Embroidering the Earth's Mantle," by Remedios Varo, depicts a number of "frail girls," this is Pynchon's words, locked in a tower embroidering a tapestry which spills out of its frame so that quote, "all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry and the tapestry was the world." The imagined portrait here bears the weight of an epistemological revolution, the revolution which came to be known, for a short time anyway, as post modernism, which tends to invert the relationship between original and copy, between fiction and the real. To read Ishiguro's portrait against Pynchon's and Varo's is to approach the balance between the material and the informational as this has shifted in the passage from the mid 20th, to the early 21st century, and from the postmodern moment to whatever has come to replace it and perhaps retrospectively shift it.

P

Peter Boxall 18:03

And then behind Pynchon's portrait we can see other portraits reaching back and back to modernism and before that to 19th century realism and before that, to the earlier manifestations of the novel form. Take

the moment for example, in Edith Wharton's novel, *The House of Mirth*, when Wharton's protagonist Lily Bart feels herself to be a continuation of Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Mrs. Lloyd, or, when Millie Teale is overwhelmed in Henry James' *The Wings of the Dove*, by her resemblance to Bronzino's portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi. Both of these moments follow closely the contours of that meeting between Josie and her portrait in *Klara and the Sun*, but in Wharton and in James this meeting is given its epistemological weight by the tension at the turn of the 20th century between a realist and a modernist worldview. In Wharton's novel Lily Bart manifests her affinity with the Reynolds portrait quite literally when she poses as Mrs. Lloyd during an evening of *tableau vivant*, becoming a living picture, just as Josie's portrait is a living picture of Josie. She had shown her intelligence in selecting a type so like her own, that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself. It was as though she had stepped not out of but into Reynolds' canvas, banishing the phantom of his dead beauty by the beams of her living grace. These beams here seem to resonate closely to me with the beams that surround Josie when she is imagined as a living portrait in *Klara and the Sun*. Wharton's Lily is not an imitation of Mrs. Lloyd, any more than Mrs. Lloyd is an imitation of Lily. As Lily stands static on the stage, allowing her body to assume the posed attitude of Mrs. Lloyd, the two are continuations of each other, sharing their being with each other as Josie shares her being with her prosthetic twin. It's in becoming Mrs. Lloyd, Lily's pseudo lover Lawrence Selden thinks, that she quote "becomes the real Lily Bart, to Lily we know," unquote. Lily's reality is enhanced for Lawrence Selden by this intimately shared relation between being and representation.

P

Peter Boxall 20:16

In Wharton, as in Henry James, this struggle between life and artifice does not quite lead to the overcoming that we see or we possibly see in Pynchon, but stages rather a fraught struggle between a modernist aestheticism and a real which it cannot fully either accommodate or reject Lily's sharing of her being with a portrait is the uncertain climax, I think, a moment of deeply compromised freedom quickly forsaken as Lily heads towards poverty, unfreedom and death. And in James's *Wings of the Dove*, Millie Teale achieves a similarly vexed form of epiphany, in her identification with the portrait of Lucrezia. It is as Millie stands in front of the Bronzino, as she finds herself replicated in the compositional fields of an old master, that she is granted some strange ecstatic understanding of the nature of her being, some revelation in which she comes to understand both that she is herself a representation and that like Ishiguro's Josie, she too, is dying, as if there's some underlying connection between aestheticism and death: being a painted portrait and having some kind of terminal illness within you. She found herself, James's narrator says, "looking at the mysterious portrait through tears." And I can hear again here a resonance with the moment in Pynchon's novel where Oedipa Maas stands in front of the Varo painting and looks at it, she says, through the veil of tears. The lady in question, at all events, with her "slightly Michelangelo-esque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great person, only unaccompanied by joy, and she was dead, dead, dead." James's entire novel I think, is concentrated in this moment, as the *House of Mirth* is concentrated in the coming together of Lily and Mrs. Lloyd. The emergence of James's and Wharton's modernism is materialized in this politically weighted encounter between a fictional character and a painted portrait, one which is itself staged as a correction to or a conversation with still earlier such encounters. It's impossible I think, not to see in Lily's affinity with Mrs. Lloyd, an after image of Oscar Wilde's living pictures in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian is portrait as what Wilde's narrator calls "a strange affinity" with the life that it represents and substitutes. But Wilde imagines this affinity not as an incipient modernism, but as a late gothicism, in which the death that James sees as a function of aesthetic representation is altogether more ghoulish. The eeriness of the bond between the portrait and its subject that you can feel so strongly in Ishiguro, in Wharton, and in James, is given a kind of full rein in Wilde and in the 19th century Gothic more broadly, and it runs too throughout the realist tradition, where the capacities of the novel to depict life truly are insistently shadowed by a fascination with the painted portrait, its particular fidelities and duplicities. Consider the painting concealed spookily behind a wooden panel of an

upturned dead face, which opens George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which is the hinge around which the novel as a whole and its novel as a whole turns. That painting that opens the novel behind that open panel, prefigures Gwendolyn's view of her husband's face as she watches him drown towards the novel's close, where she thinks, "there was the dead face, dead, dead," which calls me to that moment in James when Millie Teale thinks that she is "dead, dead dead."

P

Peter Boxall 23:49

Or think of the central episode of the portrait earlier in 19th century in Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*. Emma adopts as we all remember, an artificial friend herself. An earlier version of Ishiguro's Klara, in the form of the cheerful Hartfield resident Harriet Smith. Emma, we understand, has no real feeling for Harriet. She's not a real friend. And this manufactured friendship is a sign in the novel of Emma's faulty and partial understanding, both of people around her and of herself. This gulf between the novel's world and that world as Emma sees it is given its most condensed form in the portrait Emma decides to paint early in the novel of Harriet, with the deliciously misconceived aim of dazzling the local vicar, Mr. Elton, with Harriet's beauty. We never know really, why Emma wants Harriet to marry Mr. Elton, but she paints a painting of her where she improves her in order to coax Mr. Elton to fall in love with Harriet. The delicious comedy of this episode turns around the fact that Harriet, focalized through Emma's own skewed forms of perception, is already an artificial figure. And so, and Emma's amateur and deliberately mistaken likeness of Harriet is not so much a bad portrait as it is another version of Harriet, and Ishiguroan continuation of the ways that the novel sees her. Each of the central characters express a view on Emma's artistry and in eliciting these critiques the portrait, Emma's portrait, serves as an index of the novel's reality effect. A means of testing how ways of seeing, ways of representing, relate to some notional but impossible real Harriet, lying somewhere beyond the limits of the text.

P

Peter Boxall 25:31

We see Ishiguro here engaging this history of portraits that are acting as a test of the gap between portrait-as-representation and a portrait as a kind of stand in for reality. And when Ishiguro imagines Klara standing in front of Mr. Capaldi's prosthetic version of Josie, he activates this novelistic tradition. But what I want to finish by saying: even if we can see Ishiguro engaging this tradition, there's something else going on in the way that Josie and her portrait and Klara relate to one another, something like an approach to the way that the novel produces what I theorize in *The Prosthetic Imagination* as a kind of prosthetic ground, that isn't historically specific. And that is something like the way that the novel itself works. And there's a moment where I want us to close, thinking about how at this particular moment, this kind of prosthetic ground that is not historically specific might come to thought or to imagination. And this is a climactic moment Ishiguro's novel where the mother and Josie visit a waterfall together. The mother and Josie were planning to go on a trip to a waterfall and the mother, out of a kind of cruel tyranny rather than for any apparent reason, decides to force the daughter Josie to stay at home and say she's too ill to come out, and she's going to take Klara with her on this trip that she should have been taken with her daughter, as if she's already imagining that Klara might take Josie's place. So Josie's too ill to be able to leave the house, she's got to be confined to her bed, but the mother takes Klara with her. When the two arrive at the waterfall, they're sitting together at a picnic table and the mother asks Klara to try and become like Josie. And I think this is one of the uncanniest moments in all of Ishiguro's fiction. "Okay," the mother says to Klara, "since Josie isn't here, I want you to be Josie," and Klara pretends to be Josie. "'But now I want you to move,' the mother says, 'do something more. Don't stop being Josie. Let me see you move a little.' I smiled in the way Josie would, settling into a slouching, informal posture. 'That's good. Now say something. Let me hear you speak.' 'I'm sorry,' Klara says, 'I'm not sure--' 'No, that's Klara. I want Josie.' 'Hi, Mom, Josie here.' 'Good, more. Come on.' 'Hi mom. Nothing to worry about, right? I got here and I'm fine.'" This is the

moment I want us to end on, this moment that I think is a kind of intense proximity to what the novel can do. This is a moment where we feel the grief that the mother feels for her dead daughter Sal and for her living daughter Josie who is in the process of dying. This is a moment where we feel the absence of the addressee, but it's also a moment that magically and almost miraculously brings that voice back. "Hi mom, Josie here." This is Josie talking insofar as Josie has ever talked. This is a voice back from the dead, back from the condition of never having been. This is a more sophisticated imitation, more sophisticated than any imitation has the right or power to be, because it's no imitation at all. There is no join, or no seam, between Klara speaking and Josie speaking. As the mother leans forward as the mother who can't distinguish between the dead daughter and the living, she is speaking to Josie. She's not speaking to someone like Josie or to an imitation of Josie, but to Josie herself. "I'm sorry Josie," she says, "I'm sorry I didn't bring you here today." The question Ishiguro's novel asks—"can Klara save Josie? Can artificial forms save life rather than replace it?"—is answered here both too early and too late, as the novel voice speaks at once for Josie and for Klara, for both the artificial and the real, the living and the nonliving. The beauty of this moment is that Josie's mother is able to make the apology, the act of loving contrition for their distance and unreality, that so many of Ishiguro's parents and lovers and children longed to make. Its sadness lies in the fact that in receiving that apology, in hearing it and accepting it as she does, Josie can only conform to the artificiality for which it seeks to atone, can only demonstrate that none of us are quite at home in ourselves or in each other. It's at this moment—"I've got one more minute to go"—it's at this moment when Ishiguro's embrace of artificiality touches most closely on his pathos, that we glimpse this ground of the novel form itself, the ground that Ishiguro unearths in his conversation with Pynchon, with Wharton, with Austen and so on. This is an oddly collapsing ground, made of the necessarily strained difference between being and the forms in which it knows itself, and the magical overcoming of such difference. The voice that speaks here is the voice of the novel. The voice that can reveal to us the terms in which we encounter ourselves but only by installing a prosthetic distance at the heart of that self-encounter. And I'll leave it there. Thank you.

M

Margaret Cohen 30:14

Thank you very much. So Ian! Ian Duncan is a longstanding friend of the Center. He teaches at the University of California Berkeley, where he holds the Florence Green Bigsby chair in English and is currently chairing the department. He's the author of again a number of books. His current book in progress is about Scotland and romanticism and he has a number of different positions and sort of outreach in the field, including Corresponding Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a member of the editorial board of *Representations*, a general editor of the *Collected Works of James Hogg* and co-editor of a new book series, whose title is *Edinburg Critical Studies in Romanticism*. Join me in welcoming Professor Duncan.

I

Ian Duncan 30:57

Hi there. As Peter said just now, he referred to an exchange we had last week about how impressed we both were by the uncanniness of the attunement between Ishiguro's novel and *The Prosthetic Imagination*. It's as though Ishiguro's novel, published a year later, is itself a prosthesis of Peter's argument. Peter describes prosthesis as the master trope of novelistic fiction, an analog to the persona or mask in the drama, mediating between representing a missing thing and being the thing that is missing, its operating procedure is to escalate mimesis into identification: simulacrum into substitute. Prosthesis dissolves the hard distinction between the two poles of linguistic and figurative operation described by structuralist thinkers, notably Romani Jakobson, between metonymy, relation of addition or extension, and metaphor, a relation of substitution. Prosthesis seems analogous in this rhetorical vein to simile, working between metonymy and metaphor, softer the neither but not weaker because more flexible, articulated by the

relation "like." "Like" concatenates the world, binds it loosely, but thereby powerfully together. One thing is like another thing that is like another thing and so on. Simile makes room for difference, resists identity and substitution, since the chain of likeness keeps sliding from one term to another. Hence, and this is really the point I want to dwell on, if not beat to death today, likeness is the trope of social bonding, encompassing both genealogical relations, family resemblance, I looked like my parents and siblings and affective relations, as in the likes of social media. Like is not as strong as love, but it's more effective at holding together a large dispersed society of strangers. But for likeness to work, the prosthetic telos of substitution has to be deferred. The friend, artificial or not, must not take our place because friendship is premised on our both being present to sustain the relation.

I

Ian Duncan 33:04

To turn, then, into Peter's virtuoso reading of *Klara and the Sun*. His readings of the novels that are his book's case studies, from More and Cervantes to Atwood, Coetzee and DeLillo, are comparably dazzling. The difference between Josie and her simulacrum to be Klara is temporal. Their relation is meant to transition from likeness, resemblance, friendship to substitution with Josie his biological death, for substitution will cut both ways since becoming Josie, Klara will also cease to be—cease to be, that is in her ontological state of "friend." Except, spoiler alert, Klara does not get to fulfill her prosthetic destiny. And here comes the cruel twist, typical of Ishiguro, that consummates the novel's pathos. Peter has analyzed the scene in which the mother takes Klara on a day trip will be later understand to be a rehearsal for her substitution of Josie, culminating in her pitch perfect ventriloquism: "Hi mom. Nothing to worry about. Right? I got here and I'm fine." The irony that unfolds is that Josie does after all turn out to be fine. She makes a full recovery, moves on to adolescence and college, while Clara is discarded, obsolete, consigned to the junkyard: a more dignified fate, the mother says, than her becoming a subject for Mr. Capaldi's experiments. "Klara deserves better, she deserves her slow fade." Klara neither becomes Josie nor does she remain Klara. Instead, Ishiguro's novel plays out a primitive anthropological plot of sacrifice to a solar deity. Klara, who is solar powered, strikes a bargain with the sun to restore Josie to health. In a startling, audacious, indeed outrageous turn, the sun fulfills the contract. Josie's human friend Rick wonders: "If what happened that morning, if it had to do with you making some secret deal. At the time they I thought it was, well, all AF superstition, but these days I keep wondering if there was more to it." And there is more to it: a magical or mythic pre-novelistic topos, or at least a pre-realist novel topos. Sacrificial bargain with the gods erupts through Ishiguro's futuristic post-human narration. Peter situates Klara and Sun within a long genealogy of the modern novel, marked by an ekphrastic scenario in which a literary character confronts a significant image or effigy.

I

Ian Duncan 35:30

Reading Ishiguro's novel I thought of another novelistic tradition, and my insight here is fortuitous. It's entirely due to a dissertation in progress I was also reading last week, by one of our Berkeley graduate students, Katie Hobbs. Katie's discussion of mid 19th century debates around *Jane Eyre* prompted me to see *Klara and the Sun* is a variant of that quintessentially Victorian genre, the governess's novel, much as *The Remains of the Day* reprises a 19th century tradition of country house novels narrated by a faithful retainer, from *Castle Rackrent* through *Wuthering Heights*, *The Moonstone* and *The Master of Ballantrae*. The governess is the alien caregiver at the heart of the upper class family. Katie cites Victorian reformer Anna Jameson's pamphlet for relatives social position of mothers and governesses on the moral harm that the governess's "anomalous, artificial position," these Jamison's words, can bring, generating rebellious resentment as in critics complaints about *Jane Eyre*, or worse obliterating human feeling all together, making the perfect governess into an automaton, a machine: words that are used by Jameson, as well as by Charlotte Bronte's heroine. Klara is utterly, selflessly devoted to her charge, she's more than a

governess, she's a friend, by virtue of her being a machine: pure of any trace of Jane Eyre style resentment. As Jane Hu writes in the current issue of *The New York Review of Books*, more terrifying than the robots rebelling, as Klara shows, is they're never even considering rebellion a possibility. Klara's virtue takes the form of an extreme empathy, triggered by her uncanny virtuosity, in reading human bodies and expressions--not only exactly reckoning a person's age as soon as she sees them, but also deducing the authentic core of feeling within a fraught social interaction. Klara's empathetic art makes her more human, or maybe a better human, than the human actors around her. And it consists in her absolute inhabitation of the social medium that constitutes humanity according to a philosophical tradition that goes back to Shaftsbury, Adam Smith and other Enlightenment philosophers of human nature. That social inhabitation is so absolute as to purify Klara even of self pity, or paradoxically, of experiencing her last loneliness as suffering.

I Ian Duncan 37:54

I have to confess now, I found it a humbling experience to reread portions of *The Prosthetic Imagination* for today's event after having reviewed it several months ago. And perhaps that's a discipline all book reviewers should submit themselves to. I was impressed and not happily, by how much I had left out, how poorly I had done justice to some of the books manifold riches. Notably, its powerful account of where we are now and how we've got here. Two related things strike me: offshoots of an earlier observation. The prosthetic operation which Peter analyzes with such panache resides in a relation between mind and matter, between an observing, feeling consciousness and an inanimate object world, which is at once radically outside the observing mind and, as its constitutive biological substrate, radically inside it too. The primacy of this relation tends to posit mind or consciousness as an individual phenomenon, its existential solitude reinforced by the inhuman, inanimate condition of what lies putatively outside it. I'm interested in this light in the convergence between this model of the conscious self emerging as a liberal sovereign subject with the advent of Western modernity, and a post romantic model of the lyric subject given theoretical heft in the writings of Paul De Man. for De Man and critics in his wake, the foundational trope of lyric poetry in the romantic tradition is *prosopopoeia*: the rhetorical act of putting a human face on or giving a human voice to an inanimate world. The operation reinscribes a radically individual, existentially isolated status of a living self in inhuman world. The vital difference between this lyric model and Boxall's novelistic model is the novel's dialectical commitment to world making, to imagining and populating a reality that's larger than the individual subject. Here, one of the compelling moves Boxall makes in *The Prosthetic Imagination* is to locate the origins of the modern novel in Renaissance utopian fictions with their inventions of an imaginary world that does not substitute but overlays the world the reader inhabits. The visible gap between empirically real and imagined worlds constitutes the work's fictionality, and hence the visibility of the join between consciousness and world, at once they're connecting seem and the scar tissue of their separation, what Peter has just called the prosthetic ground, the kind of transhistorical truth that the novel opens onto. It's an insight which novels are uniquely equipped to make legible. In the argument itself and the history of the novel through which it unfolds, mind takes effective primacy over world. Although biologically, historically, matter generates what we experience as consciousness, the book reproduces the phenomenological order by which the mind is there first, or so it thinks, and then in the prosthetic operation thinks its way across and into the world. This order informs what I've characterized as the Hegelian, or *Bildungsroman* form of Boxall's history of the novel: a particular model of consciousness, an idea, drives an evolutionary progression through a sequence of historical stages to its realization in relation to contingent conditions, culminating in its full revelation, and it's critical self awareness in the prose fictions of Samuel Beckett.

I Ian Duncan 41:17

As I suggested in my review, this is a sort of meta Bildungsroman, a story of the formation of the novel. Now I mean to point to the clarifying force with which *The Prosthetic Imagination* exhibits the relation between a theory of literary form and a history of that form, a relation that is all too often buried or slighted in critical writing—we have plenty of histories that do not analyze the theoretical model that is their premise, as well as theories that dispense with historical contingency—Peter Boxall's history of the novel as artificial life is all the stronger for its extrapolating a theory of the novel at once robust and nuanced, which it does not simply assume, but argues across the framework of a progressive evolutionary history. To harp again on my question, reading the book is a Bildungsroman of the novel prompts me to ask about the social medium the novel explores, biologizes, as the constitution of its and our world.

I

Ian Duncan 42:13

Enlightenment philosophical accounts of *bildung* describe the formation of the poor, naked human self born into the world—unequipped with instinct unlike other animals—through socialization, education, the acquisition of language and the arts. Can we think of this as a prosthetic operational process? What if we revolve the axis of the prosthetic relation to reach across the self to other thinking and feelings selves? In his last chapter, Peter characterizes our present historical moment in terms of a catastrophic game changing redistribution of cognitive life between human and inhuman, natural and artificial realities such that nature is now manifest as an alien artificial force remade by us and reciprocally returning to unmake us. Recent work emphasizes the entanglement of cognitive life with its environments, which is social, as well as more broadly ecological and material. Individual cognition is a phenomenological illusion, entangled not just with nonliving matter, but with other subjects, non human, but also human subjects. And here I'm invoking, in short, an old fashioned account of the novel as in Hannah Arendt's phrase, the only entirely social art form. And I do so not to point to any flaw in Peter's argument, but to say that there are other novels which may offer themselves as exemplary of other histories of the novel. Like any history of the novel, *The Prosthetic Imagination* is a history of some novels, or of a particular novelistic genealogy, rather than of *The Novel*, an idea that may not actually exist in the world. But Peter Boxall knows this and his title issues the appropriate caution. *The Prosthetic Imagination* does not bill itself as *The history of The Novel*, but *A history of The Novel* does artificial life, and it's hard to imagine it's been surpassed. Thank you.

M

Margaret Cohen 44:09

Thank you so much, Ian. Okay, Nancy. Professor Ruttenburg is William Robertson Coe Professor of American literature in the English department here, and she also holds courtesy appointments in the department of Comparative Literature and Slavic languages and literature. Professor Ruttenburg has written a number of books, and she's currently completing a book that's titled *The Hidden Diaspora*, which asks, in the context of global trafficking of Jewish women during the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, whether it's possible to recover from historical oblivion, those who were unremarkable in their own time and whose lives were stolen from them. And she takes up the inevitability of fiction as a supplement to that recovery and the troubling ethical questions that surround it. So Nancy, thank you so much.

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 44:57

All right. So I'm really very taken with Peter's vision of the unmade ground of fiction, as he put it, "the place from which narrative being emerges." And as he says, this place is enormously and even magically generative, and it brings voices back from the condition of never having been, back from the dead. The novel voice as Peter calls it is, in this sense, redemptive, it speaks at once for both the artificial and the

real, the living and the nonliving. Both/And. This is why the novel exceeds mimesis, the real comes first, as if reality were one thing and representation another, each with its own integrity. Instead of a break, there's a space between: the prosthetic ground, the hidden join where consciousness meets with its extensions. The novel issues from that join or fold as a voice or voices capable of sustaining at length, an ever shifting vitality that makes variousness cohere. The novel sustains the oppositional energies of binding together and unraveling. This is how Bakhtin understands language itself, as centripetal and centrifugal forces that are always in powerful opposition, but that cohere nevertheless: always vitally, never statically, and across time. Not seamless, but continuation, an ontology of the artificial. So my question is whether there can be an internal resistance to The Prosthetic Imagination, or more strongly a refusal, in effect a short-circuiting internal to the fiction, that would disallow the miracle of bringing voices back from the condition of never having been, a refusal that would break that vital continuation. I see the question of an internal refusing of the prosthetic ground as a question that asks how minimal represented consciousness can get in the longest narrative form, the novel. The depth and extent of Peter's claims in The Prosthetic Imagination leads me to think that the prosthetic can't be refused in the novel, except in the case of a character, like for example, Ahab, who's refusal of his whalebone leg, his fury at it, is expressed in his monomaniacal drive to avenge its loss. That drive is what generates the novel's plot. So his refusal doesn't bring the novel to its knees. It doesn't sink into the unsayable. On the contrary, it generates his amazing soliloquy about the pasteboard mask and Melville's wildly proliferating prose itself. It sustains the novel, it works the magic of continuation. So there's a refusal of the prosthetic, but that's not the same as a refusal of the prosthetic imagination, which I think is a non-starter in the novel, it can't be refused. And I want to propose that this is what distinguishes the novel from shorter narratives, which I think can accommodate that refusal.

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 47:57

So I want to spend the rest of my time trying to figure out how they do it, and what the consequences are for narrative itself. So I want to consider four scenarios. Three involve noses, and one a pen. So the first three set up the fourth, which is an essential refusal of the prosthetic imagination, and that's Bartleby the Scrivener. So the first scenario, very brief, is the living thelyphron in Apuleius' The Golden Ass, who discovers to his horror that his nose is artificial. He's distraught. There's no question of his refusing the prosthetic, it would be absurd to rebel against the absurd, so we're in Kafka land. And just to note in passing Peter's reading of the living and dead thelyphron suggests that the emergence of the double in 19th century fiction "and I'm thinking of Poe and Dostoyevsky" is an exemplary instance of the prosthetic imagination. Second scenario is about defacement when a nose goes missing in Gogol's short story, The Nose. So in that story, a barber finds a nose and a loaf of bread his wife has baked for his breakfast. And he's horrified, as one would be. He's afraid that in a state of drunkenness, he may have cut or twisted off the nose of one of his customers. So he wraps the nose in a cloth, he's frantic to get rid of it, and on the way to his shop he throws it into the river. But sure enough, one of his customers, an ambitious and pretentious social climber named Kovalyov, discovers that same morning that in place of his nose, he has quote, "a most ridiculous flat and smooth surface, like a pancake fresh off the griddle." So he's panic stricken, because he has a date that night. He walks through the city frantically looking for his nose when he sees an elegant carriage pull up in front of a mansion and a gentleman climbs out of it, wearing a plumed hat, a golden brodered uniform with a big stand up collar, and doe-skin breeches, and he's carrying a sword. This gentleman is Kovalyov's nose, all nose, nothing but nose. The nose-less Kovalyov unhappily asks himself, "how could a nose, which as recently as yesterday had been on my face, and could neither ride nor walk" how could it be in uniform?" He finally catches up with the nose in church, genuflecting, and he works up the courage to ask for his nose back, and the nose somehow knits its brow and says: "You are mistaken my dear sir. I exist in my own right." There are similarities here to Peter's reading of Christine Brooke-Rose's short story The Foot insofar as primacy is given to the alienating body part. But of course the nose is no phantom. The nose wears a uniform, it knits its brow, it genuflects, it

insists on its independent existence and insists that it has no relation to Kovalyovâ€œâ€œdoesn't even know him. So I'm going to leave it at that, you can find out what happened, but this is the absurdity of the prosthetic taken to the nth degree. If the prosthesis wants to take on a life of its own, it can, and there's nothing to be done about it. The nose perfectly illustrates Peters observation that "we are not identical with our manifestations. The forms in which we know ourselves are always at a remove from us."

N

Nancy Rutenberg 51:15

The third scenario is taken from the British philosopher Gillian Rose's memoir *loves work*, which is about existential terror in the face of terminal cancer. Before her diagnosis, Rose meets a very old woman named Edna, whose apartment she stayed in briefly. So Edna was well into her 90s, very mentally and physically active, and she has no nose. She had a prosthetic nose that Rose says "lacked any cosmetic alleviation whatever. This proboscis could have come from a Christmas cracker." It was just this smooth flesh-colored generic nose, no attempt at making it look anything but prosthetic, and proboscis isn't a word we typically use for human nose. Edna asked if Rose would mind if she took off her nose when she was at home. And what's Rose supposed to say, it's Edna's house. So she sees when Edna takes off her prosthetic nose, there's just a neat oblong black hole in Edna's face, not a space that's flat as a pancake, but a black hole. Rose says that she'd stopped noticing the nose anyway, but she preferred the black hole when she saw it. It's worth noticing here that if the nose is the prosthetic, which it obviously is, then the black hole is the reality of the prosthetic as a representation of a nose, and Rose prefers that blank reality. So anyway, here we're talking about the prosthetic in the context of illness, Edna's face was deformed by cancer, and you can't refuse illness. And this memoir is all about that fact. But Edna does refuse the prosthetic. Here it seems that refusing the prosthetic is a choice, although a highly unusual one. And of course, we're talking about a literal prosthetic. But an artificial nose that doesn't make it possible to breathe isn't the same as an artificial leg that does make it possible to walk. The nose's function is purely social, to look the same as other people, though Edna's proboscis doesn't serve that function very well. She doesn't seem that invested in putting in the effort to buy a more lifelike nose and she refuses the prosthetic in her own home even when she has guests. Unlike living thelyphron and Gogol's Kovalyov, she has the choice and can exercise her preference. Edna prefers a black hole to a prosthetic nose. And that takes us to the fourth scenario. Melville's *Bartleby* the most complicated example of refusing the prosthetic, which is what *Bartleby* is entirely about.

N

Nancy Rutenberg 53:44

You could argue that the reason *Bartleby* is such a strange text is because it's about refusing the prosthetic, which no one thinks it's possible to refuse. In the story, everyone thinks he's just refusing to work. Here the prosthetic is the pen that would turn him into a human Xerox machine. He famously prefers not to pick up a pen and be the person he was hired to be, a scrivener. So *Bartleby* seems like the exemplary prosthetic character in Peter's definition of the prosthetic ground. That ground intervenes between the living and the dead, which is precisely, explicitly where *Bartleby* is located. The prosthetic ground is between origin and copy, quite literally here since *Bartleby* is where is supposed to be a man whose only role is to copy originals. The prosthetic ground is between mimesis and prosthesis. In *Bartleby*'s case there is the most minimal actuality for mimetic representation, which is what the lawyer who narrates the story struggles unsuccessfully to get his mind around. There is no inside narrative in *Bartleby*, and *Bartleby*'s refusal of the prosthetic pen doesn't mean he's uniquely fully present to himself. So I wanted to stop here for a second to consider Peters discussion of the unsayable and its effect on narrative in his really illuminating reading of *Benito Cereno*, which tells the counter history or inside narrative of a slave revolt. It's not that the story of *Bartleby* can't be told, obviously, since Melville wrote it. The difficulty is that in Peter's words, "the logic of Melville's fiction suggests that the revolution that the

novella calls for requires an overthrow too of the very narrative terms in which the human had been conceived. This overthrow entails the unsayable, and the urgency of saying the unsayable." This is precisely where the lawyer can't get traction, it's hard to imagine that Bartleby could ever have been a novel. In his discussion of Melville and Toni Morrison, Peter talks about a fugitive bond that cannot come to expression, but can make itself felt as a prosthetic difference, and can be expressed even only in the form of the self-preferring, tautological self-same. But there is expression, finally, to sustain the bond, and Bartleby's repetition of "I prefer not to" sustains nothing. The novel could not have sustained the refusal of prosthesis in a character like Bartleby, and in his maddening unsayability, there's no future for Bartleby other than death. There's no burgeoning of a different story. The story is radically minimalist, Bartleby's consciousness is radically minimal. And its minimalism really hasn't been superseded in literature. It tortures critics and theorists to this day. So I guess it leaves me with the question, if the novel can accommodate this kind of radical minimalism, and if so, for how long? And if it can't, it seems to me we have a very strong argument for the distinctiveness of the novel in the prosthetic imagination. Thank you.

M

Margaret Cohen 57:03

Thank you, Nancy, Ian and Peter, for just really brilliant papers. Peter, let me give you the chance, if you want to respond?

P

Peter Boxall 57:10

Yeah, first of all, to thank you both. That, for me was deeply exhilarating to hear you give much more articulate accounts of my book than I could ever give. So thank you, that was really truly wonderful for me. I'll, I'll start by saying, yeah, what you've done there, Nancy, is to formalize and formulate something that was very implicit in *The Prosthetic Imagination*. I call it a history of the novel as artificial life, but of course, it's shot through with readings of shorter narratives. And I think you're absolutely right, that one of the ways we could define the novel form and one of the ways we could distinguish between the novel form and long-short narratives, one of the ways we could define them, I think, is through that capacity to live briefly in a world without prosthetic enhancement. In *Bartleby* this, this takes us to the space of the dead letter office, doesn't it? For those of you who haven't got this at the front of your mind, it turns out *Bartleby*, this strange creature who won't copy, we find that he used to work in a dead letter office, that is letters that have been sent but haven't reached their destination. So they end up in this middle ground, which I think is the way that you're thinking of a prosthetic ground, which can perhaps remain unrealized in these short and stranded forms in a way that it's hard novelistically to achieve. I think that's, that's a really intriguing thought. An example that works very hard to refuse a prosthesis and I know you've written on this author extensively, is Coetzee's *Slow Man*.

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 58:44

Yeah.

P

Peter Boxall 58:44

Where the whole plot really is, is around Paul Raymond, refusing to replace the leg that he loses in a biking accident. And that novel holds the refusal of the prosthesis at the level of plot, against all the kind of play with Elizabeth Costello, the author of the novel, turning up in the middle of the novel, and so the prosthesis

of narrative turns out to be the prosthesis that Raymond as character refuses. Which seems to turn around everything that you were saying.

P

Peter Boxall 59:16

Which then leads me to Ian's interventions, all of which I found incredibly revealing, the relation to De Man and lyric and prosopopoeia turns, again, around how we make this space between what lies beneath the mask and the mask itself palpable. And I think your reading of what separates my understanding of prosopopoeia from De Man's is exactly right. I wish I could have put it as clearly as you did. Your thinking of Klara and the Sun as a governess novel—"I mean, that's absolutely brilliant. And then the novella I'm thinking of is of course *Turn of the Screw*. Although we'd have to kind of work that out in a longer time than we've got. But it strikes me that right at the heart of James's *Turn of the Screw* is something like the dead letter office in *Bartleby*. If you remember the plot of *Turn of the Screw* turns around writing letters back to the employer who employs the governess and not sending them. And the line that the governess uses: "These letters were too beautiful to be posted." So the ways in which we might formalize the governess child relation, in *Turn of the Screw*, has to do with how we recover that space of the dead letter or recover that prosthetic ground that underlies representation without coming to representation. And a history of the novel might be a history of the ways in which that ground is made articulable. And you and I might have slightly different senses of what a bildungsroman of the novel would look like, as you say, again incredibly eloquently, that we are going to get different models of that bildungsroman, when you look through different kinds of traditions. But thank you, thank you for those those thoughts. They enrich my understanding of what my book was doing.

M

Margaret Cohen 1:00:57

Let me turn things over to our audience. And if you'd like to intervene or ask a question, just raise your hand. Ato?

A

Ato Quayson 1:01:06

Thank you, Peter. Of course, I've read the book, which as Ian was saying, it's humbling to see how you stitch together close detailed analysis to this larger and quite stimulating argument. In fact, as I was listening to you I was trying to translate it into an analysis of postcolonial texts and I have an example that you might actually be interested in. It's Kamel Daoud's recently published *The Mersault Investigations*. He's an Algerian writer, and basically in the old idiom we would call it an intertextual text, because he is evoking Camus's *The Stranger*, *L'Étranger*, and trying to rectify an absence in *L'Étranger*. Basically, when Mersault shoots the Arab on the beach, the Arab is not given a name. So the entire novel is about animating the nameless Arab. Now the character in Kamel Daoud's novel is the brother of the nameless Arab and the entire novel is him being resentful and outraged that his brother was not given a name, was not acknowledged, and so on. But the guy, the narrator is called Harun, he's so resentful of Mersault that he progressively and I think fully consciously, becomes a prosthesis of the novel that he's critiquing. His intense desire to correct it, and also to show that Camus was essentially depopulating the historical context and conditions of the Arabs' world, but the only way he can correct it is to become like Mersault. And so for example, he becomes an atheist given to Absurdism. He is very morose and despondent. But the most important thing is that he shoots someone, he kills a Frenchman. It's almost like the killing of the Frenchman is an act that allows him to become something other than a nameless Arab. So the entire novel is a good illustration of the prosthetic effect. And in his case, the effect is generated not through a painting

but reading a novel, which is Albert Camus's novel. And in fact, this same prosthetic framework can generate productive readings in postcolonial studies where the prosthesis is generated through trauma. But I rest my case.

P

Peter Boxall 1:03:43

Thank you. I mean, I agree with everything you've just said, and in a sense that if there's a hidden bridge, in my opening remarks between *The Prosthetic Imagination* and *Fictions of the West*, it will be trying to get deeper into the ground between fictions and what fictions make real, as an effect of relations between the West and the non-West, which are everywhere at work in my understanding of *The Prosthetic Imagination*, even though I've undertheorized it in postcolonial terms. This isn't a good example, in the example is a 19th century white American writer's example, but the process whereby Benito Cereno holds Babo as a kind of crutch at the end of *Benito Cereno*, is a powerful kind of exemplar, where Delano who reads Benito Cereno as using Babo as a kind of crutch to support white power. Where there's another text at work, where in fact Babo is seeking to overcome white power. And the reading of Babo as a prosthetic for the white master sits right at that junction, that postcolonial junction, between prosthesis as sustaining a set of imperial power relations and prosthesis as an apparatus for reframing them. And I could easily imagine reading postcolonial prosthesis as one which turns around that doubleness. Does that make sense?

A

Ato Quayson 1:05:07

Yes, it does, of course. Definitely. Thank you.

M

Margaret Cohen 1:05:11

Thank you. So Mae Velloso-Lyon?.

M

Mae Velloso-Lyon 1:05:14

Hi, thank you so much. So I'd like to ask about the historical emergence of the prosthetic imagination, which I understand from the book you tie to, or maybe see as contemporaneous with the emergence of anatomy as a science. And in your introduction, you point out that the early modern state is built on the model of the body politic. But of course, one of the most influential and important discussions of the state or perhaps proto state as a body is John of Salisbury's 12th century *Policraticus*, and I'm a medievalist myself as you can probably tell, and I think about how important the extension of the body through compositions of objects is in medieval culture and fiction. For example, I'm thinking of diagrams of knights, which label all of their equipment and their horse as part of the whole, or medieval romance and all of its scenes of identity crisis emerging from the loss of prosthetic parts, or from damage to the natural body, which then causes it to lack, whatever, its former capabilities, or recognizability was. And so I wonder if you could just speak a little bit more to how you understand the prosthetic imagination emerging historically? And what specifically makes More's *Utopia* kind of inaugurate a new age? And is there a kind of historical moment behind it that you could kind of articulate a little bit more? Thank you.

P

Peter Boxall 1:06:27

Yeah, that's a that's a tremendous question. And I'm going to make this extraordinarily ridiculous claim,

without having thought about it enough, but I'll make it anyway. I think I think something like a prosthetic logic attends all acts of expression. So the earliest place where I find a prosthetic logic in that book, and we've already touched on it is in the Golden Ass, and in the relationship between dead and living thelyphron. And a colleague of mine, and me as a sort of silent partner, did a collection of essays on prostheses from medieval to early modern culture. So I don't think that a prosthetic imagination emerges in 1516, like from the inside of somebody's head and newborn. I think that there's something quite specific about the way that Thomas More, clearly working on Plato's Republic as a much earlier model, the way that Thomas More invents a fold between a purportedly real account of himself as a political member of court, and himself as a fantasy or idealized version. And there's something like the early form of a recognizable early novel born in that junction, and in making that junction fictionally realizable in the way that he does in Utopia. It's that formal junction between Antwerp and No Placeâ€”â€”

M

Mae Velloso-Lyon 1:07:55

Right.

P

Peter Boxall 1:07:56

â€”â€”that distinguishes it from Plato's Republic. And that, for me, makes it the beginning of a certain kind of novel imagination. Of course, the prosthetic imagination you can find running through classical antiquity through medieval to early modern, absolutely. There's something there's something specific about the stirrings of a kind of recognizable fiction, I thinkâ€”â€”

M

Mae Velloso-Lyon 1:08:18

Right.

P

Peter Boxall 1:08:19

â€”â€”in More, but someone might correct me and tell me that's not the case. But I think there's some backbinding between anatomy, Hobbesian statecraft, new models of fiction, that means that utopian thinking and fiction and the novel kind of emerge in a forcefield together,

M

Mae Velloso-Lyon 1:08:38

Thank you.

M

Margaret Cohen 1:08:41

Thank you, Alex?

A

Alex Sherman 1:08:44

Hi, I'll try to be fast. So this is for all the panelists. You all talk a lot about why The Prosthetic Imagination

should be a history of the novel, thinking about the novel generically differentiated from the lyric, or from the novella. And I also agree that there's something to this tight link between the prosthetic and the length of this fiction that does something. And I wonder what you think, though, about the medium specificity, like actually that it's in writing and how writing is tied to prosthesis? Peter, your presentation, you talked about portraits, and in Ishiguro's case, you know, these are things that are made into films, that excerpt you have from Klara is very, like cinematic, you know, going around the corner and seeing her, it's easy to see how this will be made it to a film. And yeah, what is it about writing that lends itself to prosthesis? Is it something about how, you know, there is no speaker present? It is just a disembodied voice separated from a human body? I don't know.

P

Peter Boxall 1:09:34

Do, do other panelists want to take that?

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 1:09:37

Yeah, I mean, this is just obviously off the top of my head, but I think that Ian was getting to that because, you know, you talked, Ian, about substitution. Continuation, obviously, transition, but especially substitution, and that sacrificial bargain. And I think language, because this is something that kind of unfolds in time, that it's suited to writing. I mean, I suppose film narrative is very close. But I find the answer in substitution. Maybe Ian you want to say something more about that?

I

Ian Duncan 1:10:08

I think yeah, I would just very briefly say, Nancy, I think what you've said about language and time. In other words, there's a medium specificity to the novel, which I think is one of the great strengths, I think, of Peter's book is that it really is about the novel, I think. If we turned to cinema or to the drama, right, we can think of, as I mentioned, briefly, the persona, perhaps the enabling trope of the drama as a genre as analogous to the prosthesis, but it's not the same thing. And it works differently in the in the sort of social embodied space of dramatic representation. I'd like to think more about this, it hooks up really interestingly with your thoughts, Nancy, about how scale makes a difference, right? The length of the novel means that something else has to be going on and the kind of minimalist reductions“““

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 1:10:49

Right.

I

Ian Duncan 1:10:50

“““that we find, that the freezing of historical progress or development that we find in something like Bartleby.

P

Peter Boxall 1:10:57

One thing I'd say in response to that question. Alex. I do spend some time early in the book. reading

the thing really in response to that question, then, I do spend some time early in the book, reading Rembrandt's The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp, and I think I do that in order to address precisely that question. How does painting make the gap between consciousness material, formalized kinds of knowledge? How does painting make that gap visible? Or thinkable? And how does the novel dwell in that gap in a way that painting can't? And I think painting makes kind of space that we've been calling a prosthetic ground, it makes it fleetingly thinkable whilst closing it down, whereas the novel kind of camps in that space.

M

Margaret Cohen 1:11:36

Thank you, Cynthia, do you want to ask a question?

C

Cynthia Vaille-Giancotti 1:11:40

Yes. So first of all, I love your presentation on portraits, I work on them. But I don't exactly work on painted portraits, but rather on verbal portraits of characters, how a 17th century socialite practice is translated in a verbal form. And so I wanted to push your analysis a little bit and ask whether you have envisioned a further layer, because yes, you are considering painted portraits, but they're still in a verbal form. Because the more I work on it, the more I realize that portraits are not described, they are mentioned, or...it's more about telling than showing, so we cannot really picture them, but we have a summary. And so that affects if we fully see? And so I was curious about that. And then the second reaction is, I was curious whether you have read, The Killing Commendatore, by Haruki Murakami, because the book opens with a nightmare of the protagonist who is a painter, and he dreams of this boogeyman who asks him to have his portrait painted. But the problem is that the boogeyman does not have a face. And so the painter asks, "How can I paint the portrait of a person without a face?" And then the whole novel is about trying to solve that question. And so you know, in 2018, here, we have again, the same question, how do we paint the resemblance of something that doesn't exist? So in a way, he's addressing the question of fictionality, how can a novel be mimetic?

P

Peter Boxall 1:13:18

Thank you. I don't know whether Ian or Nancy want to make any comments on that. Nancy, have you got...?

N

Nancy Ruttenburg 1:13:25

I just think it's a great example. I mean, it is the perfect, it's the perfect novel to talk about this. I agree. And there's the whole anxiety of influence with the, you know, legendary painter in whose house he stays because the legendary painter is in, let's call it a memory facility. In an old age home. Yeah, it would be it would be a good example.

P

Peter Boxall 1:13:48

Yeah, thank you, Cynthia. I've written it down. I think I think I didn't get very closely in my opening remarks at the very extraordinary merging of Klara and Josie in Klara and the Sun. As you say, push further behind portraiture, how it relates to Ian's brilliant work on likeness, that, I don't know if you've read Klara

and the Sun yet, I find it deeply, deeply uncanny the way that the novel animates a coming together of a person and their imitation. So that you can't see the join. It does just disappear. So I think the question of how far Klara does or does not replace Josie is sort of, there's a false climax at that midway through the novel where portraiture does produce a coming together that's more than a likeness, but there is a recognition of a shared ground between a portrait and its sitter. And a shared ground that is something like the verbal ground that you're describing, I think, but that allows for kind of saving, yeah, that, that is specific to the novel and is specific here to the novel as a kind of portraiture, I think maybe. I don't know whether that really addresses your question.

I Ian Duncan 1:15:10

I wonder if what's also going on there, though, is that Ishiguro's novel is staging that medial difference, right? The climax you're describing, which is very much about freezing time, the confrontation with the effigy is then undone, as the novel keeps going. As it proceeds as a narrative. Klara does save Josie but not by becoming her, by this weird reversion to this sort of magical thinking.

P Peter Boxall 1:15:36

Yeah.

I Ian Duncan 1:15:37

So there's a way in which the two media sort of being played against each other by Ishiguro.

P Peter Boxall 1:15:42

Yeah. And in some pact of substitution, yeah and some theology.

N Nancy Ruttenburg 1:15:48

Definitely theology. [Laughter] When I wrote to him, I said, Klara and the S O N. [Laughter]. It was a typo, but...

N Nancy Ruttenburg 1:16:00

Can I also say something about empathy in this regard? Because that's the space between, and I was really struck by, you know, this, this characteristic of kindness that Klara has. She's, she's, she's kind. And Josie is kind to her as well. And that struck me as something that takes two. So that seem to hold these two, to prevent some complete merging, as well.

P Peter Boxall 1:16:24

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And in both those points, I found myself thinking about that moment in Toni Morrison, where a character mistakes an umbilical cord, she's trying to just call it a lifeline, and she calls

it a "like line." The idea of a physical connection between mother and child as being a kind of likeness, that it's also a conduit of life. And it's maintaining a difference between beings, while still a kind of bridge between them seems to be a way of thinking about portraiture and likeness to me.

M

Margaret Cohen 1:17:01

So I really wish we could now go have drinks and have dinner and continue to discuss. It's really remarkable to be here together on zoom and to feel this intensity of thinking together. So thank you so much for your time and for your engagement with us here. It's really been a pleasure to host you at the Center. Thank you.

P

Peter Boxall 1:17:21

It's been very wonderful for me. Thank you very much.

C

Casey Wayne Patterson 1:17:30

Thank you again for joining us in this episode of the Center for the Study of the Novel's podcast Cafe. We would also like to thank Peter Boxall, Ian Duncan and Nancy Ruttenburg for their generosity and joining us in this conversation. Thanks to our team at the Center for the Study of the Novel: to An Truong Nguyen and Maritza Colon for their operational support; to our graduate coordinators, Allie Gamble, Alex Sherman, and Ido Keren; to Casey Patterson for production, editing and sound engineering; and to our host and director Margaret Cohen. The Center for the Study of the Novel is a subsidiary of the English Department at Stanford University.