

10.3 Just Slightly Outside the Circle: Peter Orner and Sarah Wasserman (EH)

Transcript

Emily Hyde

Hello, and welcome to *Novel Dialogue*, a podcast sponsored by the Society of Novel Studies and produced in partnership with *Public Books*, an online magazine of arts, ideas, and scholarship. I'm Emily Hyde, I'm one of the hosts and co-producers of this podcast, and this is season 10. We are here with the novelist Peter Orner and the critic Sarah Wasserman. Peter Orner was born in Chicago—I feel I really must start this introduction right there. He is the author of three novels, three story collections, and two books of essays, including most recently, *Still No Word From You*. Peter holds the professorship of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College. Today, we're going to start off talking about Peter's most recent novel, *The Gossip Columnist's Daughter*, a novel that is really about a lost pocket of time, the early 1960s, when Chicagoans partied in a kind of Midwestern Weimar, to quote the book. It was a distant time, it was a much more glamorous time, but one that perhaps could see its own end, as we do now. So this is also a book that really lands in our present much more immediately, because it's about conspiracy theories and celebrity gossip, and what happens when those two things intersect in the suspicious death of a young, beautiful woman. But I think the book is also trying to move past that material to say something about the weight of family histories and lost friendships. So Peter, welcome.

Peter Orner

Thanks so much, Emily. I love that idea of a lost pocket of time. That's a gorgeous concept. And I've forgotten that Weimar line. It's sort of haunting—

EH

It is very haunting now.

PO

—thinking about it today. [laughter] I was only kidding then.

EH

In conversation with Peter today is longtime and much loved *Novel Dialogue* host, Sarah Wasserman, this time coming to you in the role of critic. Sarah, and again, I feel this credential

is very important to share, Sarah has lived in Chicago for almost four years. And she is a scholar of lost things and disappearing objects, and the emotions that attach to technologies in American literary history and culture. She is currently the inaugural assistant dean of faculty affairs at Dartmouth. Sarah, over to you.

Sarah Wasserman

Thanks so much. I'm really happy to be here with the two of you today. Peter, I want to begin today by asking you to read a passage from *The Gossip Columnist's Daughter*, but before we do that, I wanted to ask both of you if you think for the purposes of this episode, it might be helpful to have a brief summary of the novel without any spoilers? Emily, you did a pretty wonderful job of that. But it strikes me that if we're going to talk at all in depth about the novel, that might be helpful.

EH

I think you should do it because I tried and failed to think of all the different genres I could have listed of this novel, and I gave up. So, a plot summary might be good.

SW

There are many. So I'll just start with a few sentences, a plot summary. This is not AI. This is my attempt at summarizing the novel without giving anything away. Okay, so the novel's narrator is named Jed Rosenthal, and he is a struggling writer and professor in, let's call it contemporary Chicago today, whose life is unraveling a bit. He becomes interested in, if not obsessed with, a real life cold case from 1963, the mysterious death of Karyn "Cookie" Kupcinet, who was the daughter of the legendary Chicago gossip columnist Irv Kupcinet. And Irv, with his wife, Essee, was best friends for years with Jed's grandparents until one day they weren't. So in the novel, Jed is digging into the past to try to solve the mystery of Cookie's death and the mystery of why his family and the Kupcinet fell out. That's just a kind of bare bones plot summary. But Peter, it would be great if you could start us off by reading a passage from the novel, and I think we've chosen a passage from near the start.

PO

Sure. Thank you, Sarah. I thought that that summary was great. It's so hard to do. It's so hard for me to do, so I'm so grateful that you did it.

"I read *Light in August* in college and I'm not sure I finished it. But I remember a character, a disgraced reverend named Hightower who tells himself (he's a recluse who never leaves his house) that the most important event in his life happened years before he was born—when a Union sniper shot his grandfather off a horse during the Civil War.

“I don't remember what Hightower did to get himself disgraced. Does it matter? Aren't there infinite ways to disgrace yourself? Faulkner knew plenty of them. But Hightower's grandfather, shouting the glories of defeat as he drops out of his saddle—this the reverend conjures nightly. It makes perverse sense. *The pivotal episode of our lives happens before we even exist.*

“In our family, nobody got shot off any horse. To my knowledge, no Rosenthal has ever ridden a horse since we fled the tatters of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and washed up in Chicago in the first decade of the last century.

“No, in my case, it's less dramatic. A friendship ended. In November of 1963, seven years before I was born, a friendship between two couples abruptly severed. Though it would be more accurate to say that these were two entirely separate friendships. One day the friendships were in place, the next they weren't. And to this day nobody, not even my mother, who has firsthand knowledge, can say precisely why. Not that anybody else wonders about this. My mother certainly doesn't.

“The four friends, of course, are long dead.

“I'm digging up the rift again. Maybe our old stories are all I've ever had. By I've now aired enough of my family's dirty laundry to open a chain of dry cleaners. Why stop now? After the rift, the drop, the breakup, the estrangement, the schism, the excommunication, whatever we want to call it, neither of my grandparents breathed a single word about any of this, and an unofficial rule took hold in my family (honored by everyone except my father, who never followed rules, official or unofficial) that barred us from even uttering the names Irv and Essee Kupcinec out loud in my grandparents' presence, let alone discussing any of the particulars of their friendship in public.

“The betrayal I've already begun to commit cuts deeper than simply naming names. But don't all families have their myths? The ones we cling to in the dead of night, as Reverend Hightower clung to his, if only to explain ourselves to ourselves.

“We can't hurt our dead, can we?”

SW

Thank you so much. I love this passage, because I think it gets at two things that I found really meaningful in this novel, and across your work more generally. So the familial stories, myths, legends, really, that get passed on through generations and come to define people, even if those stories aren't true or can't fully be known. But here also, we have through the reference to Faulkner, an allusion to other fictions and the force those stories can have in shaping us. And I'm struck by the way you're often braiding together reflections on storytelling with reflections on story reading or story hearing, the sending and the receiving. So I was hoping that this passage would give us a way for you to talk here at the opening a bit about how you approach writing as a reader and how, in *The Gossip Columnist's Daughter*, all your characters are themselves self-

conscious of being people who tell stories and who consume them, I think. So just that confluence for you across your work and here of reading stories and telling them together.

PO

Great, Sarah. Thank you. You know, what comes to mind, just popped into my head as you were talking, there's a—my mentor and great, great friend who passed away in 1999. Can't believe it's been, what, 27 years. Andre Dubus, great American short story writer. He had a story in, I think it's his last book, where he had a character on a beach and they were reading Edna O'Brien. And I just remember thinking like, "wait," you know, and there was something about that. And I love it when other stories evoke someone reading something. There's another example that I think about a lot in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*. I'm avoiding talking about my own stuff, but *Under the Volcano*, where the drunken council is wandering around this town in Mexico, wasted the entire novel. It occurs to him at one point, he says to himself, he remembers reading *War and Peace* and he remembers a single detail from *War and Peace*, and that is that Napoleon had different sized feet. And I love that detail because it's, you know, like you work so hard. How long did Tolstoy work on *War and Peace*? How many years for one drunken guy to remember one tiny thing? Anyway, I do love the thinking about narrative and thinking about why we tell stories. And I was very, I've always been drawn to that aspect of Faulkner. And in particular, in *Light in August*, when he does have this character whose life totally depended upon the story of his grandfather having behaved somewhat heroically, or very heroically, during the Civil War until a Union sniper shot him. It's not, as it emerges later in the book, the actual story.

SW

Right.

PO

And, you know, we sit on these things that are, and a lot of them are—we're perched on untruths. You know, we built our whole lives on these things. His grandfather was stealing chickens and he was shot by a homeowner, a Southern homeowner. But I do love this idea that we just hold on to. And I think we build our lives on stories true and untrue. And I think that I was trying to work with that idea in a much more mundane, you know—my people were once friends with a gossip columnist, big fucking deal. Right. But it was the same kind of idea. Like it wasn't that big a thing. And yet this family in the book sort of kind of hangs their hat on having had this experience. And I thought I could work with that.

SW

Yeah. I wonder if—it's so interesting, in light of that answer, that this is a novel about a gossip columnist, or at least in part about a gossip columnist. And when you were talking about hanging your hat on untruths, or I heard from so-and-so who heard that this was the way the

story went down, it strikes me that that's all gossip. And sometimes in the novel, I thought, okay, here we have Jed Rosenthal trying to do the opposite of what Irv Kupcinec did, to not be a gossip columnist, to write a great novel, or that sometimes those are poles and other times they seem quite similar. And I don't know if that's because, for you, gossip works the same way those familial fictions do, or if for you, they're very different. Maybe you could talk a little bit about gossip.

PO

It's so interesting. I, you know, I struggled a lot. I did not want to write a book about a writer. But then I realized I was already writing a book about a writer because the gossip columnist, I mean, he produced a hell of a lot more words than I ever have, or my narrator ever has. I mean, he wrote six columns a week at one time. And yeah, as you say—and this was in the 50s, 60s into the 70s and 80s and 90s, even, that Irv Kupcinec was doing this column. And in a lot of ways, we build our own lives on the stories we tell ourselves, our family stories, the ones we, when we introduce ourselves, we often, if there's enough time, we will tell the person we were meeting that mythical story. Who we are, where we come from, who our parents were, who our grandparents were, et cetera. And I think in some ways, the gossip at that time, and Emily was talking about the timeframe earlier, is that at that time you had a kind of a city narrative. You know, you had a guy who was taking snippets national, but most of it was local, they were local tidbits of what was happening around town. Irv Kupcinec didn't consider himself a gossip columnist. He was a collector of doings, you know, and I think that that provided, in a weird way, a sort of collective story that the city, everyone read that column. They'd read the Sun Times and they'd go to page seven or whatever page Irv was on that year. And they would read what he had to say about who was doing what around town. And I think there's something—I felt really stupid researching a book about something trivial for so long. But then I realized at one point that even though Irv Kupcinec wasn't writing important things, that he was creating some kind of record, and I started to appreciate it, even though I spent my whole life making fun of it. And I spent much of the book making fun of it too, [laughter] because it's ridiculous. And yet, I think that there's something about, who was doing what, when, at the Palmer house ballroom that night, who—Phyllis Diller's at the Palmer house, and somebody was there and some alderman was there, and—it became kind of an interesting social history, I guess.

SW

Yeah, I think it's not trivial. And you mentioned making fun of things. And I think that this book is so sincere in many ways that maybe we'll come back to, but I think we should talk about Chicago, since you're talking about the way that the gossip column—maybe it's not gossip, it's doings around town and how it's creating community. And I also just think, I don't know when they do the archival history of our current moment, what will they pull like a thousand billion TikToks of Kim Kardashian, that—what is it that constitutes community, if not things that seem trivial? But I wanted to talk about the process of research and the Chicago question here. You quote Bette Howland saying “Chicago isn't a city: just the raw materials for a city.” And I imagine that part of the research process for this book felt like gathering the raw materials of a city out of

the archives, and—did you know at the outset you wanted to write a novel about Chicago or did the research take you in that direction?

PO

I, you know, I never know what I'm doing. [laughter] Right. So all I knew as the kernel of it was that, I had this horrible thing that happened in a family. The daughter of this gossip columnist dies under somewhat mysterious circumstances in 1963, and that it was part of the narrative of Chicago at that time. Like one week before the president was killed, that was a national tragedy, but also pretty personal to Chicago. You know, a lot of people think, and there's some truth to it, that Chicago elected Kennedy, right, by getting enough votes for Illinois when Mayor Daley made a phone call. That's apocryphal, but, you know, there was a lot of people who were voting against Kennedy in the state of Illinois. So, Chicago had to bolster the democratic votes. That's the story, and some dead people voted and put Kennedy over the top. It's probably ridiculous. Kennedy probably would have won Illinois. But you know, Chicago was mourning the president in November of '63. A week later, the—I wouldn't say beloved columnist, but—the very, very famous and well-known columnist, Irv Kupcinet's, his daughter is found dead. And that became a kind of history of that particular moment. And it was a big, big story in Chicago. You know, I was born later, I was not born when this happened, but I heard about it growing up, the mystery of this particular death and how it affected my own family and how it affected the city, in a sense. And because it went around the time my brother was born and then I was born a few years later, it became sort of just something we sort of carried with us. Among many, many other things, you know, my family is just weirded out the fact that I became obsessed with this particular story. But it's like what my Massachusetts grandmother used to say, she would say, what hurts you hurts you, you know, like, you can't choose your obsessions. Right. And so I became obsessed with the idea of what the impact of this story had on the city and on a family and the Chicago part of it became inextricable from this because all my characters were operating in that space. And then I had a contemporary character who is living in Rogers Park, which is my favorite part of town. It's where my family was originally from. And so I love to wander around Rogers Park. And so a lot of the stuff that happens in the real time of the book is just for me, just every time I'm home, I go to Rogers Park and I walk the streets. And so I could imagine my character who's separated from his partner and child, and so he's living a mile away, and so he's just wandering Rogers Park. So yeah, Chicago in '63 and the 70s and then Chicago in 2022 or whatever time the book is taking place. It just became sort of a character in the book.

SW

So I wanted to ask you: the passage that you read for us ended with, you know, “can we do harm to our dead?” And since you were just talking about this being a little perplexing to your own family, as a topic that interested you, I think any good reader of this novel will recognize that there must be some of Peter Orner in Jed Rosenthal, but that there is plenty of Jed Rosenthal that is not Peter Orner. And I bet you get questions about that all the time. Do people really feel like you have done harm to the dead or aired people's dirty laundry, or do you ever

get frustrated that people can't maybe draw the line between what is something like auto fiction or autobiography and fiction-fiction?

PO

Yeah. I would say, yeah, I get it. I get it. It was sort of the dominating question around this book in a lot of ways for some readers, especially readers who are closer to the story. I struggle with the answer because it's—in a weird way, for me, it's always like the closer I get to real things, the more fictional it becomes. So Jed, sure. He teaches writing. He's a novelist. He hasn't sold that many copies. There's some commonalities there. [laughter] I don't deny. But he takes the obsession that I sort of shared in different directions and deeper directions and weirder directions. And I had fun sort of becoming him. I was thinking today, like, I don't think about this story at all anymore, which is weird. I woke up with it every day for 15 years and, and long before that, because I was always planning on trying to write this one, this was always in my mind. And I just like, and I don't let things go very easy, but I have this, like—it's out there, you know, it's gone from my mind. And I assume in Jed's mind, wherever he might be in some cosmic senses, he's not letting it go. So, maybe that's the difference, is I am ultimately, you know, the, the puppet master, to answer your question. Really. I love using real fact in almost a mercenary sense, like, I don't mind if people ask me, you know, is this your real grandparents? Is this you, did your partner leave you and take the kid, all these things. I don't mind it because something must feel real to them that they would ask me that. Now, sometimes they can't tell the difference, like, it's weird. And I'm sure on your show, you've dealt with a lot of writers who have this issue of people not being able to separate. But for the most part, I think readers do get it eventually. But I think I was particularly playing with it here. I was using very, very real things. Everything about Karyn “Cookie” Kupcinet is real, even the crazy shit, you know, even her shoplifting, even her crazy notes, even her obsession with her boyfriend actor, except for those moments that I think hopefully it goes deeper, when I tried to imagine my way into what she was actually dealing with out in Hollywood, trying to make her way at 22 years old.

EH

So this is a good place for me to jump in because what I wanted to ask you about specifically was the photographs in the novel. And you've been talking about not the line between fact and fiction, but how you can go so far into fact that it becomes a fiction and the reverse. So, let me just describe the effect of reading the novel with photographs a little bit for listeners. So, for example, the frontispiece is a photo of a door that's partially ajar. There are cigarettes like oddly strewn on the floor. It is definitely a crime scene. If you hadn't read the back of the book, you still would know there was going to be a crime, maybe, in this book. So it's a crime scene, but it's also an invitation at the very start of the book, to walk in, to enter. And then, it's not that there are photos throughout the rest of the novel, it's that the narrator's, the fictional narrator's collection of those photos is what's in the novel. So, he's pinned them up all over his office walls. So for example, we don't see the front page of the December 1st, 1963 *Chicago Tribune*, we see that front page pinned to a wall with like sticky notes to the side. And then we don't see the back cover of Kup's [unintelligible at 23:57] book, but we see this kind of creased back cover

of the book sitting on a desk, and there's like a pen and maybe a pair of glasses and a notebook in the background. We see on one page, a wall of photos and clippings kind of tastefully lit. And that is an image that's dangerously close to like the evidence room in a police procedural, or a conspiracy theorist's lair, you know, with everything pinned up on the wall and arrows connecting the dots. So as I was looking through these, you know, one thing to say is that these are almost all of them photographs of photographs. So they're participating in the kind of meta fictional aspect of this novel, the Jed Rosenthal, you know, overlap, the writer writing about a writer. They're saying, you know, look at the distance between representations in the media and what really happened. This novel is going to tell you what really happened. But then as you were speaking, it struck me that you could almost say the exact opposite too, that all these photos are real. I assume you took them or you had someone take them for you. I'm guessing. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm one of those naive readers, but maybe I'm guessing that they're photos of your own walls and thumbtacks and archival discoveries. So if that's the case, then the photos are pushing against the fiction of the novel itself, its status as fiction. So, I guess my very basic question is just why is this novel illustrated with photos, but I'm also interested in how, like, what was the process? And then finally, how do you imagine the relationship between the photographs and the fiction itself as fiction?

PO

I don't remember a moment where I decided to put these pictures in, but as you suggest, as part of the research process, I compiled, I mean, thousands of images and documents and—and *stuff*, you know, because of the fact that I had a columnist who had all these columns. One thing I did was I love to pretend to write the column. So I never use the real stuff. I had too much fun parodying it, so I could become Kup. I think I make him a little goofier than he actually was, but he was pretty goofy. But anyway, the pictures, they just felt like I couldn't separate the process of telling this story from obviously myself going through this stuff, but then imagining my crazy narrator going through it. And so it really became, I mean, this sounds cheesy, but it was me and it wasn't me. It was like, Jed was like—and yeah, certainly it bears a striking resemblance to my little studio in White River Junction and not necessarily his office at Loyola University in Chicago, but it felt to me like it wasn't me. It was really him sort of like staring at these weird pictures all day and then putting them in. I wanted them to be sort of sprinkled throughout the book and as a way of sort of trying to prove this is true. It was all in service of the fiction. I want you to believe it. But yeah, technically, where'd I get them from? Yeah. I took the pictures myself with my phone. [laughter] And then I called my across-the-street neighbor, Alberto, who's credited in the book, to make them print-worthy. But he was taking pictures of my pictures, of the pictures with an actual decent camera. And so he'd come in and do this stuff and I would call him up and I'd say, Alberto, I don't like what we did. Can we try this again? I mean, he took hundreds of pictures. I was so annoying to him.

EH

I love the idea that these real photos, these like facts, if you will, appear in the novel in service of the fiction, of the fictional character and his fictional obsessions.

PO

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He's a fictional guy looking at real things.

SW

One question I have, which is related to the caring about the characters and caring about Cookie. It's funny because when Emily and I—I think Emily, you might've finished and I was about halfway through the novel and we were sort of texting about it, and she said, that was a really hard one. Like I actually felt very moved by the murder of this young woman. And she said that, and I said to her, well, I feel like it's as if Philip Roth were less cancelable and wrote a murder mystery. And I meant that as a compliment.

PO

I'll take it. I'll take it. [laughter]

SW

And the comparison comes, I mean, maybe I should say that's a question about genre, right? Is it a murder mystery? Is it true crime? Is it a family saga? Is it autofiction? Is it a riff on Herzog, a retelling of that? But the comparison for me comes in part of course, because the novel is very clear about the ways in which this is a “Jewish”—that's in air quotes, for listeners—a Jewish story. And by that, I mean that the narrator talks about his Jewishness, about what it means to be Jewish and socially striving in Chicago at this moment in the 20th century, and about the ways that at the time Jews were shaping culture, in the press, in Hollywood, in music, in baseball, you name it. They were the cultural producers, but the cultural outsiders. And you handle all of this, I think, in the novel with a lot of nuance and a lot of humor. I actually loved the bit about being a Jew at a Jesuit university and what kind of license it gives the narrator, but could you talk about the importance of Jewishness to this particular story and what you wanted to say about it?

PO

That's a tough one. You know, especially today. But, you know, I always say, when I'm teaching, or when I'm talking about writing about,, kind of stuff that's in your orbit versus stuff that's maybe not in your orbit. And my answer to that has always been, for better, for worse, is that what makes you think you can tell the story of your own people? Much less—you know what I mean? Like it's all hard. You want to go outside yourself and imagine your way into some other space, go for it. If you want to try and imagine yourself into what you think is your own space, go for it. Cause that's—I say it's equally as hard. To, to make it, you know? And so, you know, I wasn't writing from personal experience. I was writing from what I was researching about what it was like to be, as you said, and I think striving is an important word here, for 1960s

Chicago Jews who were, I mean, if there's an assimilated Jew in this country, it's them, right? It's my grandparents. Sure, they were Jewish, and they moved in somewhat Jewish spaces, and Irv Kupcinet was Jewish and unapologetic about it. Not hiding it in any way. But also, they were very much a part of the fabric of the city, in a way that, while they were insiders in an Irish town, certainly Irish political town, but they were deep insiders. And Mayor Daley had close Jewish advisors and Jewish comrades. But I think Jews always, and maybe to this day, have a little bit of a pushed away-ness, you know, that for better or for worse, is just a part of being so few, you know. And, I don't know, I think I just want to investigate that idea. My grandfather was a World War II vet, somewhat based on Lou in the book, but Lou is a different kind of guy. My grandfather was a big blowhard, and he would take up all the air in the room, and Lou doesn't do any of that. And I wanted to deliberately sort of make him not my grandfather, but they share that they were both captains in World War II. And, you know, that was a big deal to my grandfather. I remember reading his letters from World War II and he would—there was one letter, there was one letter where he used the word—it was in capitals and it was M-O-T. And I didn't know what he meant for a long time. I had to ask around, and somebody finally told me what it meant. It means member of the tribe, right? And he was coding the letter because he'd met someone on a ship that was an M O T and they didn't talk about it, but they identified each other almost silently. That was what the subtext of the letter was. And I think, I don't know, that I've always sort of carried that around with me. Right. And you know, that's not the case today, right? We don't have anything like that, I suppose. But I wanted, in this book, to explore what it was like to be doing really well, but at the same time, looking over your shoulder.

SW

M-O-T. I haven't heard that either. That's fascinating. And it just strikes me that in some way, it's also a kind of, of gossip, right? That it's the, who knows what, and who can say what, and what don't we have to say to one another. It's a nice through line. And I suppose the current Gen Z or Gen Alpha version, which is completely secular, is game recognizes game, right? [laughter]

PO

Nice.

SW

Right.

PO

One thing I just thought of, real quick, is that I think your identity is only just a tiny fraction of the story that goes forward. And the identity is always shifting and never quite, you know, I had fun having a Jewish professor at a Jesuit university, a fairly—Loyola is not entirely secular, right? Even to this day. So I had fun kind of just having him talk to the Monsignor on the quad or whatever it was. And, you know, but like, just, I think everybody's an outsider in some way. And

I think I sort of just worked with that idea that I had characters who were able to pass in the city and become of the city completely. And yet always, there's always that distance. And I think, especially with the grandparents characters in the book, Babs and Lou, they became sort of isolated out in the cold because of their ability to see more truth and be more honest. And there's lots of ways you can become slightly out of the circle, you know, and I was really exploring that idea. And so, you know, identity is only just a tiny part of it.

EH

I think that's a great place to end. Thank you so much. Peter, you're not quite off the hook yet because *Novel Dialogue* always asks a signature question, the same question, of all the different novelists, guests, for each season. So for season 10, our question is, who was your favorite teacher?

PO

I'm going to say, you know what I'm going to—Mrs. Winnie Angerman [unintelligible at 36:07] was my English teacher in high school. I loved, I wrote a—in a book of essays, I wrote a letter to her apologizing for a paper I had written on *The Scarlet Letter*, and I tried to write it again. Anyway, but so Winnie was great. She passed away a few years ago, but I'll say someone who is, as far as I know, and I'm sure I'm right about this, is still living. And her name is Tish O'Dowd. And she is a lecture professor at the University of Michigan. And she took me under her wing and she read my stories when I was a punk. And I took like four classes with her. I basically went to the University of Tish. I didn't go to Michigan. I went to her and she would—she was hilarious. And if you were funny, sometimes she really gave you a pat on the back. And so I was always trying to make her laugh. And I can't overemphasize the kind of encouragement that somebody like that—she just said, you know what? And I was writing these stupid, you know, dumb, drunk college kid stories, like literally that's what they were. You know, it was one about a car accident. Anyway, it wasn't terrible, but she said, you know what? She saw a little bit of inkling of something. And I can't tell you how grateful I am to Tish O'Dowd. She sometimes goes by Tish O'Dowd Ezekiel. I'm not sure exactly what she is at the moment, but she does have one novel and it's called *Floater*s. And it's a beautiful novel. Anyway, Tish Ezekiel was a wonderful professor at Michigan.

EH

That's great. Thank you. And thank you for being on *Novel Dialogue*.

PO

Oh, thank you, Emily. Thank you, Sarah. This was great.

We'd like to thank the Society for Novel Studies for its sponsorship, *Public Books* for its partnership, and the Ric Edelman College of Communication, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Rowan University for its support. Beck Daly is our production intern and Connor Hibbard is our sound engineer. If you liked what you heard, tune into the 50 plus conversations between novelists and critics that we have archived at *Novel Dialogue*. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.