

>> Hello. Good afternoon. Welcome. I am Dara Goldman [assumed spelling]. I have the distinction of directing the program in Jewish Culture in Society here at the University of Illinois.

[Applause]

[Laughter]

I'm delighted to welcome you to an evening with Nicole Krauss, sponsored by the program in Jewish Culture in Society in conjunction with the George A. Miller Program Committee of the Center for Advanced Studies. This presentation is also this year's Greenfield Lynch Lecture. And, I want to especially thank Debra Lynch [assumed spelling], who has traveled from Washington, DC in order to be here with us tonight and whose generous support and enthusiasm for Jewish literature were crucial ingredients in bringing this program to fruition. The list of campus partners is too long to enumerate here, but I encourage you to read through them on the poster for tonight's event in order to see the extraordinary array of units that have come together to make this event possible. We are enormously grateful to everyone who has lent their support, both monetary and nonmonetary, to make this possible. Before I introduce our speakers, I want to give you a bit of context for today's program. This is the final event in a year long series on 21st Century Jewish Writing and the World, which has included visits by three previous writers, a scholarly symposium on the topic, and other events and conversations throughout the year. Throughout the series, we have grappled with questions about the weight of Jewish history, notion of wandering and permanence, of displacement and the search for the illusive space from which to speak to and about all of these issues. We have noted how all of the authors in the series weaved together voices and storylines, spanning multiple contents, I'm sorry, multiple continents and generations as they present their particular narrative worlds, worlds in which a multitude of truths converge and intersect, yet persistently refuse to neatly fit together. Given this evolving trajectory of these conversations, I can think of no better note to end on than tonight's program. The work of Nicole Krauss invites us to meditate on all of these issues by juxtaposing characters, spaces and objects that are as compelling as they are haunting. She embeds all of this imaginative material moreover with impros that is both engaging and probing. I'd like to offer one brief example to illustrate this from *Great House*. A professor of romantic literature at Oxford in the midst of mildly paranoid musings about his wife's strange attachment to a young man who had appeared on their doorstep, expresses the following idea, "we search for patterns, you see, only to find where the patterns break and it's there in that fissure that we pitch our tents and wait". This is just one of the many moments in Nicole Krauss's work in which ordinary everyday perhaps even banal events lead us into extraordinary lucubrations on the nature of time, space and existence. I want to give Nicole every opportunity to reflect on her work with us, so let me just say a few words about our presenters before turning things over to them. Nicole Krauss is the author of several best selling and award winning novels, *Man Walks into a Room*, 2002, *The History of Love*, 2005, *Great House*, 2010, and *Forest Dark*, 2017. And, in case you didn't notice on your way in, we have several of the aforementioned novels for sale, in particular *Forest Dark*. The [inaudible] bookstore has graciously come to offer those and Nicole will be available to sign them for a brief period at the end of the presentation. Her work has earned numerous distinctions such as winning the Orange Prize and the Saroyan Prize for International Literature. Her novels have been finalists for the Los Angeles Times Book Award and the National Book Award and to date have been translated into more than 35 languages. Tonight, she will read from *Forest Dark* and discuss her work with Professor Brett Ashley Kaplan. Brett is Professor of Comparative and World Literature and the Program in Jewish Culture in Society, as well as directing the Initiative and Holocaust Genocide and Memory Studies. She is the author of *Unwanted Beauty Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation, Landscapes of Holocaust Post-Memory and Jewish Anxiety and the Novels of Philip Roth*. I am also especially thankful to her as my predecessor and partner in crime since she is the driving force behind the Jewish Writing and the World Series, including and especially tonight's event. Please join me in welcoming Brett and our distinguished guest, Nicole Krauss.

[Applause]

[Background Noise]

>> Okay. Would you like me to begin?

>> Yeah. Go ahead.

>> Okay. Okay, good. Thank you for having me and happy to meet all of you. I think we're going to have time at the end for questions from the audience, is that right?

>> Yes.

>> Okay, good. So, start thinking of your questions now. I'm going to read to you a little bit from Forest Dark and what you need to know about this novel is that it is made up of two voices and those voices alternate and begin to intertwine as the novel progresses. One of them, the book opens with this one, it's a story of Jules Epstein. And, Epstein is a 68-year-old American, New York lawyer. He is kind of larger than life. One of these people who just never needed to be silent because he always knew exactly what he wanted to say. An enormously successful attorney who over the course of his lifetime has acquired all kinds of material wealth, beautiful art collection. And, in the wake of his parent's deaths, who died somewhat quickly one after the other, he also leaves his marriage of more than 30 years. And, he begins to feel a kind of, I guess a kind of doubt that rises up in him for the first time in his life and that doubt is something long the lines of what if I was wrong, you know, what if all the certainty was not based on something solid. And, what if I neglected some other way of living. And, so he sort of turns away from the material. He begins to give everything that he owns away and he goes to Israel in search of something he can do in his parent's memory with the last of his wealth. And, he begins to, you know, in that turning away from the material, he begins to turn toward the spiritual realm I suppose you could say. And so, that's his story, but his story begins with his disappearance in the Israeli desert and it back tracks trying to figure out what happened to him. And, the second narrative is the narrative of a writer. And, she is at a moment in her life when somehow all of the forms she's chosen for herself, whether they be the novel as a writer or whether they be wife, mother in life somehow seemed no longer to fit her, or at least she feels the constraints of those forms. And, she begins I suppose to wonder about the kind of stories we tell ourselves about our lives, the narratives we tell ourselves about our lives and how they can confine us. And, she's stuck in a moment of certain despair about her work. She's obsessed with the idea of setting a novel at the Tel Aviv Hilton Hotel, which is - well you can't see it from where you are, but it's this hotel. It's on the cover of the hardback of Forest Dark. And, the Tel Aviv Hilton, if any of you have ever been there or seen it, it's this massive, sort of the least inspirational architecture you can imagine. So, it's sort of odd that someone would be drawn to it aesthetically or as a location as a setting for art. But she begins to describe in the passage I'll read to you, she describes to you why she's drawn to that place, what it means to her. And, she ends up going to Israel, checking into that hotel, ostensibly [phonetic] to do research on this novel, but then all kinds of other things begin to happen to her. She starts a journey, she's pulled into a journey by a man who may or may not be a former Mossad, may or may not be a former professor of literature at Tel Aviv University, but he brings her to the house on Spinoza Street where the remains of Kafka's archives are and begins to draw her into a project involving Kafka. And, her story really begins in Israel there. So, I think that's a good enough --

>> Yeah, wonderful.

>> -- synopsis. Okay. So, let me start with Epstein. No one could have imagined it - oh, all kinds of souvenirs from my travels.

[Laughter]

Thank you. That's my French publisher.

[Laughter]

No one could have imagined it and it came to seem like a fitting end. Death was too small for Epstein. In retrospect, not even a real possibility. In life, he had taken up the whole room. He wasn't large, only uncontainable. There was too much of him. He constantly over spilled himself. It all came pouring out, the passion, the anger, the enthusiasm, the contempt for people, and the love for all mankind. Argument was the medium in which he was raised and he needed it to know he was alive. He fell out with three quarters of everyone he had fallen in with. Those that remain could do no wrong and were loved by Epstein forever. To know him was either to be crushed by him or madly inflated. One hardly recognized oneself in his descriptions. He had a long line of proteges. Epstein breeds himself into them. They became larger and larger [inaudible] everyone he chose to love. At last, they flew like a Macy's Parade balloon. But then one

day, they would snag themselves in Epstein's high moral branches and burst. From then on, their names were anathema. In his inflationary habits, Epstein was deeply American, but in his lack of respect for boundaries and his tribalism he was not. He was something else and this something else lead to misunderstanding again and again. And yet, he had a way of drawing people in, bringing them over to his side, under the expansive umbrella of his policies. He was lit brightly from within and this light came spilling out of him in the careless fashion of one who hasn't any need to scrimp and save. To be with him was never dull. His spirit swelled and sank and swelled again. His temper flared. He was unforgiving, but he was never less than completely absorbing. He was endlessly curious and when he became interested in something or someone, his investigations were exhaustive. He never doubted that everyone else would be as interested in these subjects as he was, but few could match his stamina. In the end, it was always his [inaudible] companions who insist on retiring first and still Epstein would follow them out of the restaurant, fingers stabbing the air, eager to drive home his point. He'd always been at the top of everything. Where he lacked natural facilities, by sheer force of will he drove himself beyond his limits. As a young man, he had not been a natural orator, for example, a list begotten in the way. Nor was he innately athletic. But in time, he came to excel in these especially. The list was overcome and many hours in the gym and the honing of a wildly, cutthroat instinct turned him into a champion lightweight wrestler where he encountered a wall. He threw himself against it over and over, picking himself up again until one day he went right through it. This enormous pressure and exertion were perceptible in everything he did and yet, what might have come off as striving in anyone else, in him seemed a form of grace. Even as a boy, his aspirations were gargantuan. How many people know what to do with money? His wife, Leann [assumed spelling], had been allergic to her family fortune. It stiffened her and made her quiet, but Epstein taught her what to do with it. He bought a rubens [phonetic], a sergeant, a mort like tapestry. He hung a small Matisse in his closet. Under a ballerina by Degas, he sat without pants. It wasn't a question of being crude or out of his element. No, Epstein was very polished, he was not refined, he had no wish to lose his impurities, but he'd been brought to a high shine. And, pleasure he saw nothing to be ashamed of. His was large and true and so he could make himself at home among even the most exquisite things. But at the end, there had been a kind of drift. Later on, when his children looked back and tried to make sense of what had happened, they could pinpoint the beginning of his transformation to the loss of his interest and pleasure. Something opened up between Epstein and his great appetite and received beyond the horizon a man carries within himself. Then, he lives separately from his purchase of exquisite beauty. He lacked what it took to bring it all into harmony or got tired of the ambition to do so. For a while, the painting still hung on the walls, but he no longer had much to do with them. They carried on their own lives, dreaming in their frames. Something had changed in him. The strong whether of being Epstein no longer dusted outward. A great unnatural stillness settled over everything as happens before radical events of meteorology. Then, the wind shifted and turned inward. It was then that Epstein began to give things away.

[Background Noise]

So, this is the second voice, this narrator speaks to you in first person. So, remember, she's telling you about the Hilton Hotel and her - what draws her to it. To begin, I was conceived there. In the wake of the Young Kippur War, three years after my parents were married in high winds on the Hilton's terrace. They were occupying a room on the hotel's sixteenth floor when the unique conditions were the prerequisites for my existence suddenly aligned. Bless you.

>> Sorry.

>> No. No problem [multiple speakers]. With only the [inaudible] sense of the consequences, my mother and father instinctively acted on them. I was born in Beth Israel Hospital in New York City, but less than a year later, swimming upstream, my parents brought me back to the Tel Aviv Hilton. And, from then on, almost every year, I've returned to that hotel perched on a hill between [inaudible] Street and the Mediterranean Sea. But if the place has a kind of mystical aura for me, it isn't only because life began for me there or that later I spent so many vacations at the hotel. It's also the [inaudible] nature of something that once happened to me there, an experience that only increased my awareness of an opening, a small tear in the fabric of reality. It occurred in the hotel swimming pool when I was 7. I spent a lot of time in that in pool, which was set in a large terrace overlooking the sea and fed by salt water. The year before I visited had overlapped with [inaudible] and one morning after breakfast, we came out and found him parked by the deep end throwing a ball to his children who took turns leaping into the pool trying to catch it. The site of the great violinist in his glinting wheelchair, along with a murky awareness that the polio that had crippled him had something to do with swimming pools terrified me. The next day, I refused to go down to the pool altogether and the day after that, we left Israel and flew back to New York. The following year, I returned to the hotel with a feeling of unease, but Pearlman

didn't reappear. Furthermore, on the first day back, my brother and I discovered that the pool was full of money. Shekels everywhere, shimmering mutely on the floor of the pool, as if the drain were hooked up to [inaudible]. Whatever lingering fears I had about swimming were shunned to the side by the steady flow of cash we could turn up. As in any well-run operation, we soon divided and specialized, my brother two years older, became the diver and I with the smaller lung capacity and keener eyes became the spotter. At my direction, he would plunge down and grope around at the blurry bottom. If I had been right, as I was about 65% of the time, he would burst excitedly to the surface clutching the coin. One afternoon after a string of false calls, I began to feel desperate. The day was wearing on and our time in the pool was almost up. My brother was waiting morosely along the wall of the shallow end. I couldn't help myself and from the middle of the pool shouted, there. I was lying. I'd seen nothing. But I couldn't resist the chance to make my brother happy again. He came splashing toward me. Right there, I yelled. He went below. I knew there was nothing at the bottom and now treading water at the top, I waited miserably for my brother to find out too. The crushing guilt I felt in those moments comes vividly back even more than 30 years later. It was one thing to lie to my parents, but to so blatantly betray my brother was something else again. As for what happened next, I have no explanation for it or none beyond the possibility that the laws we cling to in order to assure ourselves that all is as it seems have occluded a more complex view of the universe, one that foregoes the comfort of squeezing the world to fit the limited reach of our comprehension. Otherwise, how else to explain that when my brother surfaced and uncurled his fingers lying in his palm was an earring with three diamonds and beneath them hanged from a gold loop at the bottom a ruby heart. In dripping bathing suits, we followed our mother through the frigid air-conditioned hallways of the hotel to the H-sterns in the lobby. She explained the situation to the [inaudible] jeweler, who looked at us dubiously as he pushed a tray lined with blue velvet across the glass countertop. My mother laid the earring down and the jeweler fit the loop to his eye. He studied our treasure. When he lifted his head at last, his giant magnified eyes swiveled over us. Real, he pronounced. The gold is 18 karat. Real. The word catches in the throat and won't go down. It never occurred to me that the earring might be fake in the way that my mother had suspected it was. And, yet only I knew just how unreal it really was, how against the odds was my brother's discovery of it, how it had materialized in answer to a need. No young child naturally believes that reality is firm. To her, its springs are loose. It is open to her special pleading. But slowly she is taught to believe otherwise and by then, I was 7, old enough to have mostly come around to accepting that reality was fixed and utterly indifferent to my longings. Now, at the last minute, a foot was put in the way of a door closing. Thank you.

>> You ready for --

>> That's it. Yeah.

[Applause]

>> So, I wanted to also just thank Dara [assumed spelling] and Masumi [assumed spelling] and Gina [assumed spelling] and Sara [assumed spelling] and everybody who maked - English is actually my first language --

[Laughter]

-- who made this visit possible. It's just an unbelievable pleasure to have Nicole Krauss here as the Capstone event of the 21st Century Jewish Writing in the World Series and I'm so honored and delighted that you accepted our invitation. And, I just have to say, I'm a fan.

>> Thank you.

>> So, I have some questions. [Inaudible] structures Epstein from the very beginning of the text as outside of time. And, Nicole, from her first chapter as outside of space, she's in two places at once and he has fallen outside of time. Nicole becomes fascinated with the idea of the multiverse, the notion that multiple universes exist simultaneously. And, your novel enacts in a sense a multiverse concept of reality. It takes an almost Syfy turn by the end. Man Walks Into a Room, which is Nicole's first novel, also has a taste of Syfy with its central conceit that Samson has lost 24 years of his 36 years worth of memories, but that a mad scientist is able to import another traumatic memory that of witnessing a nuclear bomb test in 1957 into his brain. Are you a Syfy fan and what's your connection with the sort of unrealities that you manifest?

>> I haven't read much Syfy, so I haven't given myself the opportunity to be a fan. Maybe I would be if I read more. But I guess I don't - I don't normally think of the genres, like, you know, those distinctions seem like things that get put on art rather than the ones that the artist herself thinks of. I really, I think, you know, when we say that Epstein's outside of time or Nicole is outside of space, I think what I would revise that a little and say that they are both or their author's playing with the accepted ideas of how we inhabit time and space. And, trying to suggest that there may be more flexibility there than we like to allow for or we allow ourselves. Because, you know, this notion of the multiverse, which is really only mentioned once and it's mentioned as a kind of way to at least give some credibility to Nicole's thinking about this possibility of occupying two places at once. But for her, it's much less theoretical. It's actually something very visceral and instinctive, right, because her earliest memory is of looking at the television and seeing herself as a two and a half year old there in the studio audience of this children show she's watching. So, her whole memory is built on this foundation of the absolutely sound belief that she was both here and there. And, I think that that gets unpacked in the book. There's the sense in which it's, you know, it's something we've all experienced, right, whether we know or and that, but, you know, [inaudible], you know, I'm here but my heart isn't, in the sense that we can be [inaudible] but our longing and our imaginations can be elsewhere. Or, that we are, you know, I was born in America, but all of my family were from elsewhere and those other places where my four grandparents were from were kind of lost in the war and nobody ever returned to them, so there's the here and then there's the there of that lost place. Or, there's the here thing, an American Jew, and there of Israel that we always are, like especially today with elections. You know, we're kind of always going back and forth between. So, I think that's very real in a sense and there's also that other gnawing sense of what would have happened in my life if I had turned left instead of right and not met so and so, but met [inaudible], or not taken that job and taken something else. And, the infinite progressions of ways in which our life kind of panned out. So, I think those ideas are very [inaudible]. Of course, like falling outside of time, I think is something that happens to all of us. To some of us, it happens on like a daily basis, right. Like you're - you don't - you're like how did it, I was driving and how did I get home. I was just like in my mind that whole time, somewhere else, you know. So, I think that time is definitely something collapsible and expandable depending on our experience. So, those two things don't feel like Syfy to me as so much as very real.

>> Yeah. Good. That brings me to another question I had, which is about memory. So, it seems like by the end of the novel, Nicole is able to recall, past tense, things that have not yet happened, future tense. So, there's a lot of exploration in this text and in many of your text about memory and the role of memory. And, I already mentioned that a Man Walks Into a Room, part of the plot of it is a man named Samson has a tumor and he loses this long stretch of memory. So, are you, like, is it just because I'm a memory study scholar that I'm seeing all of this memory or are you thinking explicitly about memory? How does memory function for you?

>> Can I ask you a question? Do you think my books have more in them about memory than other novels? Because to me, it seems like memory is everybody's subject. Like, how could it not be our subject. It's what we have to reconstruct the past and therefore our sense of selves and everything we imagine about the future is predicated on what we can construct of our past. So, to me, it's so completely interwoven with identity and our sense of being and everything, that it's hard to imagine memory not being a subject.

>> Yeah. I would say your novels definitely have more about memory than some other novels, maybe not more than [inaudible] --

>> Right.

>> -- or something that is explicitly about memory and you cite the beginning of [inaudible] novel when you have that moment where there's a [inaudible] envelope that the, you know, that Nicole is experiencing.

>> Right.

>> So, there's definitely a sort of Proustian tinge here, but I would say definitely there's an explicit concern with memory, especially obviously a Man Walks Into a Room, when a Man Walks Into a Room --

>> Sure, yeah [multiple speakers].

>> -- because then it's also somebody else's traumatic memory is forcibly shoved, implanted into his brain and he rails against that. So, there is a very - it seems to me that that novel especially --

>> For sure.

>> -- but this one too is very much about memory. But you're, I mean, that's a good point. Lots of [inaudible] about memory.

>> I agree there about memory. I just don't know how unusual that is, but I take your point. I think, you know, obviously the question of to what degree we are bound by the past and to what degree we can become free of it is one that's occupied me throughout my career as a writer. And, you know, in a Man Walks Into a Room, there is definitely this sense in the beginning of the book of this possibility of being freed from nostalgia or the various, you know, the ways we're confined to a life and Samson is kind of exploded into this shapeless place of the desert, but it just turns out to be so alienating, right, because without memory, we don't have the ability to empathize with others and if we can't empathize with others, then we are just locked in the experience of ourselves. And, then he is, you know, he's given the difficult experience instead of like arriving at empathy through the structures of our own memory and, you know, ability to relate to another memory, so they just planted it in his mind, which is terrifying.

>> Yeah.

>> Or, it's not the way that we want to do it, right. And, I think underneath all that was this thinking that, well, you know, isn't this the unique value of literature? We talked about this a little bit earlier today, but isn't this opportunity that literature gives us to step into another person's shoes so vividly and become him or her. You know, when we read a character and we read a really great book that we love and feel for, we really become those people and they become us and it adds this whole dimension to our being. And, that's an extraordinary thing. And, I don't think that we can find that experience almost anywhere else. Not in film, not in painting, you know, just only really in literature. So, I think that's always - those questions have always been on my mind from the very beginning.

>> Yeah. That's wonderful. This is related a little bit to what we were talking about. The arch of your four novels indicate an increased [inaudible] between your characters I would say. Man walks into a room, tells a story of someone who although he's forgotten, he still longs for a connection to his wife, Anna [assumed spelling]. Apart from the beginning and the end, the whole novel is focalized through his point of view, which is very different from how all of your other novels have multiple sections that interweave and the character unfolds with every deepening complexity. In History of Love, you begin the switching of consciousnesses that will then characterize the next novel and this switch is often between someone young and someone quite old, some female and someone male. But in History of Love, Alma and Leo Gursky ultimately connect. In Great House, a myriad of multiple perspective emerge, but all the characters connect through the mysterious great desk. Here in Forest Dark, Epstein and Nicole remain parallel. They share some connections. Yes, they have Tel Aviv Hilton, [inaudible], Kafka, King David, reflections on time, space, memory, trees, stars, birds, [inaudible]. Many things connect them, but their paths never converge. Do you see this as indicating any increased distance or how do you read that?

>> No, I think maybe it has something to do with the fascination with structure and the possibilities that are afforded to us as novelist when we try to reinvent the form of the novel in such a way that suits perfectly the content of that novel. And so, in the case of History of Love, that, you know, that book just wouldn't have worked unless Alma and Leo were brought together. In Great House, it wouldn't have worked had those people been brought together. It would have felt sort of [inaudible] I think in some way. And, it really wasn't the point. It wasn't necessary. And, I think in this book, you really - in Forest Dark, there's a necessity for - these are not people who don't relate, right. You know, Epstein, you know, his life was full of relationship. He has children. Nicole has children. They have - but this is not about that relating. This is about a moment unto themselves in a sense. And, I think that the need to have storylines connect is one that maybe we can like slowly disband with. I'm not - I think that if we allow for their richer subterranean connections to begin to speak to us, we can get a much more subtle meaning than if we have to go through all these contortions of bringing a story together. But I do like surprising ways that, you know, obviously I'm trying to create a whole. In these books, I wasn't interested in short stories. I'm really creating a whole. And so, it's a little bit like the instrumentation of a symphony. Like, I'm very much aware of where harmonies are being formed and where there are echoes and repetitions

and I find meaning in those and I hope that the reader will. I'm thinking, for example, in Great House of the stone that goes through the window and the stone that, you know, that is thrown by the, you know, assess officers who come to arrest Weisz's family when he's [inaudible]. You know, there's that moment where his life is one way and the stone is thrown through the window and his life changes forever after. And, there's that reverberation of that stone sort of moves through the novel and it ends up in the part of Arthur and Nadia, of course, and when he finds his window broken ends up in Israel and it hits [inaudible] windshield, you know, when his son is driving. And, so there are things like that. And, in Forest Dark, there's a moment towards the end of the book where a taxi driver that is there who drops off Epstein becomes like, you know, the savior of Nicole in a sense. And so, I like moments when we're aware that these stories are happening in the same world, right. But I don't think that we need things to sort of tie up necessarily on the narrative level.

>> Yeah. And, the stones, I mean, another thing that I always find in your work which is so compelling are the portals that open through things. So, in Great House, there's a desk and the desk contains drawers and in the drawers there are postcards and the postcards are portals or possible portals, right, and you often have the image of a door closing and another door opening, a whole other thing opening. And, it seems like the stone as that metaphor that runs through all the different stories. And, Great House is one of those moments where the portal is quite literally pierced by the stone and then it opens into something else, right.

>> Yeah.

>> It seems to be very present.

>> Yeah. Yeah. But again, I think, you know, those are often like accidents that happen in the writing. They're not like deliberately planned. I think that the scene, if I remember correctly, the scene of the stone going through the window invites [inaudible] is not written until the end of the book, but I had it in my mind for a long time and then I think I was just thinking, you know, there's the part of [inaudible] Israel and stones get thrown against windows all the time and I think that stone hit there and I thought oh that connection there and then it got woven in. But a lot of times, you know, what begins with a pattern or becomes a pattern begins with an accident. And, I think a lot of writing is recognizing the useful accident, the accident that is worth saving and extending into something valuable.

>> Yeah. It really surprised me earlier today. Some of you were there. We had a workshop and at the workshop, Nicole said that she writes without a map. And, I was really surprised because one of the things I wanted to ask you was about the intensely complex and wonderful plots of your novels. In the little bits of fiction that I'm working on, I struggle very much with how do you, you know, because I have so many different ideas, how do you get the plot to work. And, it really surprised me when you said you write without a map, because the plots are so intricate.

>> Yeah.

>> And, while, you know, this novel the two characters remain parallel, there's still so many interlocking things. So, do you really write without a map?

>> Absolutely.

[Laughter]

I never knew where any of my books were going until they got there. I never knew how any of them were going to end until they ended. I wouldn't recommend it as a way to write.

[Laughter]

And, you know, it can be really trying because, of course, it could not come together and it could fail. But I find that that improvisatory approach allows for those accidents I was describing. And, allows for error in a way that I just think if I tried to plan things out in advance, I wouldn't have. And, I think - I love solving those structural problems. And, I don't mean in an engineering way, because often the structural problems they're about meaning, right. So, those moments

where some small twist can create something really elegant in the structure or meaning are what I live for as a writer and those are always discoveries. You just can't find those until you're there in the midst of it. So, I really allow things to unfurl themselves.

>> It's amazing. Both Epstein and Nicole are the inheritors of long Jewish historical lines. Epstein somewhat to his amazement is told by [inaudible] that he's a direct descendent of King David. And, we know from the first lines, so I'm not plot spoiling here, that Epstein is doomed to disappear. As it happens, he disappears into the desert with the crown of David on his head. He fades as it were into his own historical line. Nicole, on the other hand, is interpellated into the long line of Jewish literature by the expectation that she will produce the magical script based on Kafka's [inaudible] works. While it seems at one point that she might similarly disappear, she in fact re-emerges out of the blank pages she has been given to write and goes home. Home in this case to defined as Brooklyn and not as she tells us at the opening as Tel Aviv. Can you talk about the gender component of these long literary lines?

>> What do you mean?

[Laughter]

>> Well, I mean, he's - it struck me that Epstein is the inheritor of, you know, King David, whereas Nicole is the inheritor of all of Jewish fiction. Were you sort of thinking those in gendered ways or how were you thinking of those [multiples speakers] two inheritances?

>> Right. It's interesting. I didn't think of inheritance. I think Great House was a lot about the question of inheritance for me and the question of what is it that is passed down to our children that we don't necessarily want or mean for to pass down. You know, I mean, all of the thousands of years of psychology and trauma and, you know, difficulty that it came to us and we pass onto them and the burdens of that inheritance. And, I think in Forest Dark, I didn't think of Epstein as the inheritor of David or nor Nicole as the inheritor of - although there's a moment, right, where there's a suggestion that she should be, but she laughs at it. It's totally absurd to her, right. But I think what I thought about vis-À-vis Epstein and David had more to do with the win which are story of ourselves is so largely shaped by the narratives we have available to us. And so, if we are told from, you know, early in our lives the story of, you know, the Old Testament and we, you know, the story of, you know, Moses and Abraham and David and we keep calling our children [inaudible] and David and, you know, but there's a saying which we're kind of not necessarily doomed to repeat, but like all of the values that we have find their original meaning in or even descriptive adjectives we find the original meanings in those or stories that we tell about ourselves and who we are. And, there's this moment when Nicole is talking reading to her children and she's talking about how, you know, that wonderful look that children get in their eyes when you're reading them the stories of the Odyssey, the wonderful Greek myths or what we know. These are the stories we've been telling for so many thousands of years and they're amazing, they're wonderful, but she has this sort of [inaudible] of doubt as to like isn't there a way in which she is also closing the door on all of these other possibilities of being that as children they still have available to them because they're not yet cultured by, socialized by all those stories, what are all the possible other ways of being if it wasn't Moses and Abraham and David [inaudible] other stories of ways of being. And so, Epstein, who, you know, is given this little tip, like, just, you know, fairly mentioned but Kafka and this rabbi says to him, yeah, Epstein, that name goes all the way back to King David, which apparently a few names like Diane and [inaudible] supposedly do. And, he laughs at it, he scuffs at it, but it does begin to percolate and sort of down into his consciousness of like wow, you know, this warrior king who was beloved by so many but who was also cutthroat and wild just like he was, but who also was this author supposedly of some of the most beautiful poetry ever written, right, the Psalms. And, so there's that grace that is there at the end of David's life or his story that is lacking Epstein and I think for Epstein, it's not so much that he models himself on that David [inaudible], but he turns toward that possibility of that grace. So, I think I was using those ideas - I was playing with those ideas in different ways rather than trying to think of them simply as inheriting those long traditions.

>> Yeah, interesting. This is another topic, not one that we've started to talk about yet, but I've just come from New York where I was at a Philip Roth conference, so I always have Philip Roth on my brain, but I have him more so. And, it did strike me that Operation Shylock particularly, but also The Ghost Writer sort of haunts this novel and actually a lot of other of your works, including Roth's early Kafka short story where in similarly Kafka didn't die in 1924 as we unfortunately know he did. He went to New Jersey and started teaching Hebrew. As is the case in the main character in

Operation Shylock, Roth calls him Philip Roth. There's two Philip Roth's actually in Operation Shylock. Nicole is named Nicole. Like the fictional Roth, Nicole feels doubled. And, perhaps most importantly, both novels are set in Israel. Were you thinking of Roth specifically or is it just more [multiple speakers]?

>> I always think of Roth too, but he was a really dear friend of mine and we used to talk about this book a lot when I was writing it and at some point, so it did happen to me that when I was soon after the History of Love was published, I was going to Israel and my father's cousin wanted to speak to me and wanted me to meet somebody who had this great story he wanted my help with. And, my dad said, apparently this guy is like from the [inaudible] and I was like, like come on, you know, right.

>> Just like Operation Shylock.

>> Please. Well, so the point is, I did meet with this guy and so that story gets sort of thwarted and changed, but appears in Forest Dark. But when Philip and I would talk about it, we would talk about that and I would say, except it actually did happen to me. I'm not making it up, it's real. And, of course, he called Operation Shylock a confession, not a novel, which I sort of love. But I don't think, I mean, I think calling a character by your own name unfortunately is no longer a novelty.

>> Right.

>> Like, it's, you know, there's been countless books and more and more seem to do it. We talked this afternoon about why I think that is. And, of course, there's not a real shortage of Jewish novels in America that turn Israel or are interested in the double. But I think I think of Roth because of another reason, which is that he so constantly engaged himself with the idea of what it is to break from the reigns of duty. I mean, his whole life as a writer was in response to the expectation of being dutiful and the need to be free to say the unsayable, to agitate, to upset, to, you know. And, I think that that struggle, that wrestling with duty, because he was - there's also the - it's not, you know, he's not a complete rebel, there's also the sense of being the good son, right, being a good boy too. That's always there and also at play in his work. So, I think that wrestling is something that always spoke to me, even as a young writer. And, I hope there's the imprint of that in my work.

>> Yeah, definitely. There's definitely the imprint. There's a lot of scalar changes in your work. We talked about this a little bit this morning when Dean Franco [assumed spelling] was here as part of the 21st Century Jewish Writing in the World. He discussed this a little bit and that got me thinking about the way in which the scalar could be brought in in terms of the sheer size of the behemoth of the Hilton, with its endless windows, which very uncomfortably don't see the sea as you want them to, which is then scalarly very different from the tiny golden earring which you just so beautifully read us about, which becomes the necklace. And, then in History of Love, there's the scalar model between the [inaudible] Alma of the original novel, which is also called the History of Love, and the mini Alma in the kid, the center of the text. In Man Walks Into a Room, there's the epically huge atomic bomb testing in the Nevada desert that is balanced against the tiny cherry-sized tumor that eradicates most of the half Jewish Samson's memory, the central object of Great House, the huge desk contains within its very wood scalar variance in its oddly shaped and two multiple drawers, some of them containing portals to or traces of other worlds, snapshots, postcards. Do you see this scalar or is it something you thought about consciously or does it just intuitively appear?

>> No, didn't think about that at all. It's a nice thought. I like it. But it's not something that I was - it's not a design that I had consciously in mind. But again, I think so many of the sort of esthetic and design choices we make have to do with an instinct we have of what works well together. So, if I have an old man and a young woman, it's because to me, that sort of works esthetically and I can come at things from both sides. It makes sense that if you have something monumental, you might also have something tiny and delicate. So, as you say it, it sounds right to me, but I certainly didn't have - well, because I never know what I'm doing when I'm doing it, but I didn't have it in mind as a design.

>> Yeah. Fascinating. Can you say more about the pull of Kafka? For so many contemporary authors, Roth, of course, but also, as you probably know, the South African write, [inaudible], includes many references, both direct and oblique, to Kafka and his writing, the German writer, [inaudible], also contains many illusions, not least as an incredible scene wherein his main character is quite sure that Kafka is sitting next to him on a bus. To what do you attribute this

geographically diverse and profound return to this particular writer and does this attachment speak to the alienation that some of your characters experience?

>> I think if Kafka had lived to like a ripe old age of like 85, I don't know if we'd have the same fascination. I think part of it is like that his life was extraordinary, so short. He died - he was just 40, you know. And, he was so unusual person, you know, in the way that he didn't fit into the world really. I think he wrote about never feeling at home in the world. He only felt at home in his writings and his literature. And, I think that's something that many writers just relate to. And, then of course, I just think so much of his sensibility whether he was tapping into his time or whether he influenced the time that followed some of both, but he really, you know, gave us the word for a whole sensibility that would come. But I think there's something more. It's like, when I think of Kafka, you know, I remember even before I read him when I was younger in high school, I kind of like - there was something familial about him, like Kafka, like Uncle Kafka, right [multiple speakers]. He was just like that in the family somehow. And, then when I read him, there's this strangeness of him, but part of the strangeness is also how familiar he is at the same time. And, I only think of him as Uncle Kafka because I think of him as like, you know, there's sometimes like a person in a family that is so different than everyone else, like a great uncle or something who opens up a path for being for you, you know, that you otherwise couldn't have had coming from where you came from. And, he's like that, I think, and, you know, there's a whole number of people who cling to his coat and follow that path.

>> Yeah. I have just one more question and then we'll open it up to the audience. Actually, I have like 79 more questions, but last question. So, following up on the Kafka thing, the idea of metamorphosis is obviously incredibly central to this novel. Epstein is lightening himself of everything, his wife, his coat, unwittingly his possessions, his millions. He's transforming into a light creature who eventually disappears. When he was accumulating and younger, he offered his cousin, [inaudible], a lobster, which was received by the latter as a terrifying insect. Most importantly though, both Epstein and Nicole are dealing with [inaudible], the translated name and in both Yiddish and Hebrew of metamorphosis, which means wheel. And, of course, the name of [inaudible] outfit. What does [inaudible] mean to you?

>> There's actually that moment of Epstein in the apartment when the place for the apartment is that cockroach [multiple speakers].

>> Yes.

>> What does [inaudible] mean to me? Well, I wanted to call this book [inaudible].

>> That's what I was hoping you would say.

>> Oh, yeah.

[Laughter]

I wanted to call this book [inaudible], but my publishers wouldn't let me. And, that shouldn't be legal.

[Laughter]

They really have very little say or they have wonderful little say because they give me a lot of freedom to write whatever feels right to me, but the title is a place where you have to be in agreement, because in a sense, I guess, it's like the path [inaudible] book and it's a publisher's job to sell the book. So, I had a long debate with my publisher and just sort of argued about this and they said, you just can't, you can't - it's not English, you know. In other words, this is an American book and you have to have a word that people understand and [inaudible] sounds to us like some, you know, medieval dragon or something. This is going to be about dragon slaying. And, I said, you know, it's really not the case, like, you know, literature brings us words for things that we don't yet - concepts or feelings we have that we don't have a word for and literature can help us to find those. So, for example, like before [inaudible] called his story [inaudible], I don't think anyone in America knew what a [inaudible] was and now - at least some people in America know what a [inaudible] is. Thanks to --

>> You have a [inaudible] here.

>> Thanks to that story. And, I argued about this and I said listen, like, I promise you, you know, this is so this like in the summer or the spring of like 2017 and I said, I promise you like if we call this book [inaudible], like you'll see. Like, very soon afterwards, there's going to be like some, you know, Vanity Fair article that's going to be like Trump's [inaudible].

[Laughter]

And, it'll be part of the language. And, they were just, they were so polite. They're so lovely, my publishers, and they said, well think about it. But no, oh no, I can't. And, then so I came up with Forest Dark, which of course is from Dante's Inferno and then right before the book was coming out, a friend sent me a link, a YouTube link to - what's that television show called?

>> Where's Robin Little [assumed spelling], they would know?

>> It will come back to me in a minute, but a television show that all of you have heard of. And, these two characters are sitting at a bar and one of them said to the other, you know what this is? And, the character [inaudible] says, this is my [inaudible]. And, the character is like [inaudible]? Like, [inaudible]. It's, you know, it's a circle or a will, but it also means, you know, the reincarnation of life. And, I was like, I can't believe it, like this is --

[Laughter]

-- that was going to be my cultural gift and here it is [multiple speakers].

>> Did you say that to the publisher?

>> I think I did, actually.

[Laughter]

Yeah. It was - oh, anyway. Fargo. That's what it was. Fargo.

[Laughter]

>> Good. Well, we have time for some questions if there are questions from the audience. Nicole already asked you to prepare your questions. Hopefully you did.

[Background Noise]

>> Yes.

[Inaudible Response]

Sure.

>> That sort of thing.

>> Sure. Let's see. Well, background - my grandparents I mentioned were all from Europe and my dad grew up in Israel and my mom grew up in London. And so, they met in Israel and then moved to New York. So, I grew up in New York. And, I think I new from the time I was about like 14 that I wanted to write, but I thought I wanted to be a poet until for like ten years I was really serious about becoming a poet and I went to Stanford and a few weeks into my freshman year, I met an incredible poet called Joseph Brodsky, a Russian poet who won the Noble Prize. And, he became kind of mentor to me and I was really serious about poetry. And, if you would have told me that I was going to become a

novelist, like a [inaudible] writer, I would have been totally shocked.

[Laughter]

But I think at a certain point I finished at Stanford and I had a Marshall Scholarship, which brings about 30 or 35 students to graduate school in the UK for two years. And, so I went to Oxford and I was going to - I was doing a doctorate in English, but I just found that I was like at the library every day with all these books of theory and then I had just like gone too far from like my love of literature. And, I still wanted to be a writer and it seemed kind of absurd to be in the library at like 21 or 22 with a lot of books of theory. So, I used the second year of funding to get a Masters in Art History at the [inaudible] Institute, which is in London, and I studied 17th Century art and wrote about Rembrandt. And, then I came back to New York and I kind of had like a choice of what to do or had to decide what to do next. And, one option was to continue studying - doing a PhD in Art History. Poetry certainly was not going to be any way I could make a living, but it also had become really, really closed down for me, like the poems I was writing became smaller and smaller. Joseph Brodsky had really encouraged me to write in form, but somehow this formal verse rather than, I mean, its free verse is free for a reason, right. So, the poems became really tight and kind of not free. And, Brodsky had died by that point and I kind of felt like, I don't know, maybe I just needed some to kind of like break a window in this writing thing and get some air in it. And, so I had friends who were trying to write novels and I thought, why not, like maybe I should try to write a novel, like, what, you know, what could that be like. And, so I sat down and I thought of an idea and I took a year and I wrote my first novel, which became *Man Walks Into a Room*. And, I think the moment I was really writing that book I felt that wonderful freedom that I still really search for as a writer and find in writing novels. And, I think there's that freedom because a novel is so ill-defined formally, like it's just what do we say about it? It's a long story with a beginning and an end, but otherwise, it's really an invitation to the writer to try to reinvent the form every time she tries to write one. And so, I found that really liberating and I felt really at home in the form, so. That was when I was 25 and I haven't looked back since.

>> Very good.

>> Yeah.

[Background Noise]

>> Eric [assumed spelling].

>> Yeah, thanks so much for being here.

>> Sure.

>> [Inaudible] presentation. I wanted to ask you about another traveler in *Forest Dark*, which is Epstein's coat.

>> Yeah.

>> And, his telephone that has a kind of parallel journey and parallel to him and I think eventually [inaudible] goes from like a meeting with [inaudible] entourage to [inaudible].

>> Right.

>> Yeah, ends up in Gaza.

>> So, can you talk about [multiple speakers] travel and how it fits into the other journeys that are [multiple speakers] *Forest Dark*?

>> Yeah. So, yeah, the question is about Epstein's coat and his phone. So, what happens for those of you who haven't read the book, is early on while he's still in New York, he goes to this meeting at the Plaza. He's invited to this meeting to meet [inaudible], who's there to address the security council of the UN and he's there with his whole entourage. And,

Epstein checks his coat and there's this whole presentation, then he goes to leave and someone has taken his coat. And, it's this beautiful, like cashmere coat. And, he has to kind of settle for this like horrible copy of it, right. This like kind of cheap coat. He tries to argue, he tries to get his coat back, but then he takes this other coat and he goes downstairs and then he just sees like this member of his entourage leaving and he sees his coat and he tries to get it back and it's gone. And, so then there's this a little bit of tracing of what happens to that coat and the phone, just in the pocket of that coat. And, what can I say about that? I went to that meeting at the Plaza. That's how it kind of ended up in the story. I was invited to that meeting and I didn't - my coat wasn't stolen, but it was kind - there's something really unusual about that moment of being there and that conversation meant to be had between him and these sort of American Jewish leaders and like the artificiality of it, but the good intention of it and everything about it. And, the fact that there would not be any other, you know, meeting beyond that, you know. In fact, my mom came with me on the way out. I was like, I don't know if you thought she was [inaudible] big bear hug, which I thought was wonderful. But I think, you know, there's - it's very hard to write a book about Israel and not turn toward the many other stories that aren't being told in a book that's set in Israel. It just wouldn't have felt right to me. And, I don't even think that I meant - it wasn't deliberate. Like, okay, he's my nod to that, but so it just - it wound the quote, you know, that thing happened to me, this imagined coat goes and the phone has to be in its pocket because of - and it just - but it also had, you know, so where was [inaudible] going? I had to follow it. But it felt right to me because of that need to at least like just nod to this, you know, the story of these Palestinians who are living alongside these Israelis. And, in the end, there's a sense that like there's that trial to - it was like the inheritor of that. Maybe the story continues. Maybe the rest of the story is his to tell in a sense.

[Background Noise]

>> I'm just waiting for the microphone.

>> Oh.

[Laughter]

[Background Noise]

>> Thank you. Writers often say that they don't know where their characters are going to come out by the end of the book. And, even though you said you didn't write with a map, you still have an idea of what you want to do. So, is there sort of a pull where the characters are? How do you reconcile the pull of the characters going their own way so to speak or developing themselves with getting to realize your ultimate idea?

>> I really - I don't mean to argue, but I really don't know where I want to go, I mean --

>> Oh, okay.

>> -- I think there has to be like a suppleness in the approach towards that where you are both guiding and being led as a writer. So, it's not to say like, I'm like, oh, whatever happens happens. Like, I write a few pages and then I think a lot about what's there and I'll tweak them a little and go back to the pages before. I mean, for the longest time, every day when I sit down to write, I'd reread what I've written from the beginning. So, there's constant like evolving and changing and thinking about things, but I don't, I really don't know where I'm going. I don't - it's not like I have something I want to say and the novel is the vehicle for saying it. The novel ends up saying all kinds of things that I didn't even know that I had to say or wanted to say. And, they are said through the truths of the characters and their circumstances and how they deal with and resolve or don't resolve those circumstances. Just giving oneself that opportunity allows for all of the stuff one wants to say to come out. It's a little bit like in your dreamlife, right. Like, whether you like it or not, what you're thinking about, what's bothering you, all kinds of understandings you have, will come out in your dreamlife that aren't available to you in your daily awaking life. And, then afterwards, these dreams will stay with you and like wow, that was amazing that I dreamed that and that means or that. It's the same thing with writing a little, in that you have to give into that dream like state a little bit, but you have the reigns, so you pull back a little, you go faster, you go slower, you change course. But that give and take is very much part of how I work.

[Background Noise]

>> I have a question about Great House. The name is really kind of all of a sudden surprising because it comes from moving. You cannot hear me?

>> No.

>> Can you hear me?

>> No. Is the microphone on?

[Inaudible Response]

>> Can you hear me now?

>> Yeah.

>> Okay. Sorry. It's about Great House and how the name comes from, if I understand correctly, of moving the house of study from Jerusalem to [inaudible]. Is that related somehow to putting the desk in storage or? To me that somehow seemed very related and I just wanted to see if you had - if that was intended?

>> Right. I think that, you know, that story, it's such a beautiful story, right, of [inaudible] who is there, you know, in Jerusalem during the siege in the first century of [inaudible]. And, there's all of these sort of political arguments among factions within Jerusalem about what to do and, you know, the Romans are surrounding them, people are dying, and there's starvation. And, ben Zakkai makes this very unusual decision to stage his own death. And, he does that so that he will be brought out in a coffin. The only way to get out of Jerusalem is to be a dead body. So, he's brought out of Jerusalem. And, you can imagine - I can imagine his guilt in all of that, right, to leave, to kind of be a deserter in a sense. But he's brought before the General, who later becomes the Emperor of Rome. And, he kind of strikes a deal with him, deals that he'll be allowed to let go, but kind of like, you know, go far away and he goes to [inaudible] and he opens this house of study. And, it's there that, you know, the oral law begins to be then taught again and passed down and then later on, the Mishna begins to be transcribed. And, so there's this like beginning of this continuity and, of course, then later on, that sense that Jerusalem is not a place is not necessary for our being. Like, that it used to be that, you know, to be a Jew is to be of this place, to be of this place in that capital with a temple. And, now the temple is gone and, you know, if Judaism is going to survive, it has to become portable. And, the genius of how to make it portable, which I think Yohanan ben Zakkai really assisted in was well, we'll just put it all down into writing. And, that writing will become what is holy. And, you [inaudible] be a Jew wherever you are so long as you have those books or have memorized those books. And, that is what allows for the survival of a people to this day. And, it remains unique in a sense, I think. So, I think that [inaudible] is incredible and Great House is the name of his house of study that burns in Jerusalem. So, you know, there's so much in Great House about the ways in which things are passed down and made portable and, you know, carried with them the weight of history and inheritance and so, it just seemed like absolutely the right title for this house, which I really thought of this novel as like a house for me. Like, it was - I remember trying to describe how I wrote, because people are always baffled by when I explain that I don't write with a map and I would try to explain it that it was like an architect of a house, but like it would be like instead of having a design for the house, first I have like a little door handle and then I have like to build the door for the door handle, and then I have a door and a handle, but I have to build a room that you would enter into and then other rooms off of it and staircases and a roof and do the engineering. And, then when the whole thing is finished, I like walk out of the house and close the door forever and that's it. It's over. Like, I never read my books after they're finished. But they really are houses and while I'm writing them, I'm living in them. So, it just made so much sense in so many ways to call it that. Yeah.

[Background Noise]

>> Eric.

>> Okay. Sorry. I'd like to ask another question [multiple speakers].

>> Sure.

[Inaudible Response]

[Laughter]

>> I want to ask you about another title --

>> Sure.

>> -- that you spoke so eloquently about Great House. I want to talk about Forest Dark and about Forest in Forest Dark, because on the one hand, it's this kind of illusion to Dante, which now I realize was the kind of alternate title --

>> Right.

>> -- but it's the title, nonetheless. And, it seems to also map onto this journey that Epstein has, which is to build Forest in remembrance of his parents --

>> Yeah.

>> -- who have died. And, so you have the kind of title, the Dante [inaudible] converging with this actual forest of trees that's being built in Israel through Epstein. So, I just wanted to hear a little bit more about --

>> Sure.

>> -- the title Forest, how Forest fit into your idea for the novel.

>> Yeah. So, as you said, the title came very late after the book was written and so I hadn't really been thinking about those lines of Dante, but then later, when I thought of them again and I hadn't read the Inferno or the Divine Comedy [inaudible] opened since college. So, it was strange that they just flowed into my mind, but they're here at the end of the book and I'll read them for people who are unfamiliar with them. Midway upon the journey of our life, I found myself within a Forest Dark for the straightforward pathway had been lost. And, it was so perfect for so many aspects of this book, on the one hand the sense of having lived a lot one way and that way being about a kind of organized way of living, a certainty, a straight path, and losing that and becoming lost. And, of course, this is book that sanctions becoming lost, even encourages becoming lost, right. It's a good thing rather than a bad thing. But the forest was perfect because they were already, you know, planted throughout the book. And, I think in the beginning, the forest first appeared in Nicole's section when I was writing her and she's talking about this idea of [inaudible], and, you know, who always talks about finding a straight path out of the forest and she sort of talks about how much that drives her crazy, because she always heard once, you know, to get lost. And, she kind of takes issue with various concepts of his, but from the beginning, that idea of the forest is raised as an example or the thing that is opposite of order, right. It's and there's the city which is the human architecture, the reflection of our sense of order and then on the other side of that is the forest, which is beyond the law. It's where other worldly, frightening things happen in novels and poetry and plays and Shakespeare. Wherever you look, the forest is that place where inexplicable things happen, but also dark things can happen. And, to get lost there is ambiguous, you know. It's not a good thing or a bad thing. And, so the forest takes us first as an idea and then, of course, it becomes this reality and Epstein wanting to replant the lost forest of Israel. Israel was covered with forests, something that the book talks about, as was all of North Africa. And, all those trees were cut down for agriculture and it changed the geography and weather of that place and an extraordinary way. And, he has this idea in memory of his parents of planting this, you know, massive, massive forest. And, it seems symbolic to me of this idea of giving up the old order, giving up the old certainty in favor of this uncertainty of the forest, this lack of order, this lostness. And, then came that Dante quote and it was just as if it was waiting for this book.