Recall This Book
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Episode 152: Why I Paneled: Kristin Mahoney, Nasser Mufti (JP)

John Plotz

Hello, and welcome back to Recall This Book for the nightcap tour doubleheader. I'm your host, John Plotz of Brandeis, and you probably just listened to part one of “Why I Panel” starring Kristin Mahoney of MSU and Nasser Mufti of University of Illinois, Chicago as two world-weary academics, now actually genuinely weary academics, looking forward at that moment to being on a panel together. So if you did not just listen to that, go back and listen to it stat, and we will wait.

Okay. So welcome back for the flip side, “Why I paneled: the aftermath” in which we spill the beans on what actually happened, and then decide if it was worth the effort, the sleepless nights, the quadruple lattes, etc.

So Kristin, Nasser, hello. Welcome. Thanks for doing this with me.

Kristin Mahoney:

Hi.

Nasser Mufti:

Thanks for having us back.

JP:
Okay. So basically, we're just going to dive right into it. I will say I had a good time. I think all of us had a great time at the conference generally, as well as the panel itself, which was to me, you know, just like mind-blowing. I loved both your papers. But, you know, let's get into this question of what the post panel takeaway is.

So three things I thought of asking that we will get to. I'll just say them all right now, but whichever one you guys want to start with. So one is something that happened in the writing or the brooding on your paper. So something in

the run up that actually helped or potentially something that hindered you.

Then, something that happened at the conference (and this I really have something to say about this one) Your own thought while speaking or in response to your paper that was helpful, or something else that you heard at the conference or read as a result that might prove productive for you going forward. So basically, you know, like the good, the bad and the ugly. Who wants to start?

KM:
I can go ahead and start. I mean, I think I was, I was differently nervous about giving this talk. I feel like for the past couple of years, a lot of times when I'm giving a talk, it's been like a book talk where I'm kind of reflecting back on a project that's completed, or the talk that I had given just before coming to Boston was something that I had, that was really kind of finished and settled and that I felt pretty confident about.

So I was, the morning that we were actually, because it was the first event of the day, I was like, I really don't know if I should be talking about this material. Yeah. So that was great. I mean, it was terrifying, but I feel like it did force me to start thinking about shaping all of the material that I've been working with.

I mentioned to both of you, I'd come back from two different month-long archival trips, one to India, one to Ireland. And I think if we hadn't had this in place, I would be thinking I needed to read like 90 more books before I even set a first sentence about it, which might technically actually still be true.

But it did force me to get into the space where I started to actually shape this into a narrative and that felt good even though I was absolutely terrified the morning that we were actually getting up to give that talk in a way that I feel like I haven't been for a very, very long time.

But I do feel like it got me going and I was thinking about how much more fruitful it is to actually give a talk when you're at this phase in the project where you can really hear the suggestions that people are giving you and that you have time to read the things that people are telling you would be really, really crucial for doing the work moving forward.
So yeah, it was a terrifying but very, very useful experience.

JP:
Can I just say you made me think (Nasser, you're up next definitely!) but just a couple of footnotes on that. One is that you made me think for the first time since graduate school, I think of the Stephen Greenblatt concept of salutary anxiety, which he said is this kind of Renaissance breakthrough that was like a Protestant deviation from the theological configuration of English mindset.

That salutary anxiety was that sense, that kind of Weberian sense of like needing to fall forward into your vocation. So that's one thing it made me think of.

But the other, which I 100 percent agree with, is the point about talking before you're ready to talk if you have the correct kind of group/audience for that.

And to me that's like the, there's a Jonathan Lethem book called like the, is it called The Sleepless Detective [actually Motherless Brooklyn] or something? Do you guys know? about the detective with Tourette's? Anyway, he has a line, *Tell Your Story Walking*, which I just think, yeah, that's kind of how my projects work for me. Like I need to be telling them while they go on.

And I think of conferences as a place to tell your story walking. So yeah, ideally without anxiety, but inevitably with some anxiety.

KM:
Or terror.

JP:
You said terror, not anxiety.

KM:
Yes, terror.

NM:

Yeah, for me, it was, it used to be the case that I'd have arguments figured out in papers written well before. But I was honestly writing that thing till the evening before, right before we went into the conference itself, in part because this is new stuff. And for some reason, I need that, like, I don't know, like that,

that I guess sort of terror, but I would say more just like confronting imminent interpolation, that like I will have to present this, people will understand in a certain way.

And that always for me now, in the last few years, has always been incredibly clarifying for what I want to say. And so like I didn't know where the paper was going to land until really that day before. And then also, I just like when you hear a lot of papers, somehow, you know. This is a, I guess, a loosey-goosey hippie-ish way of describing it--but being in other people's language clarifies my own.

And so that was, yeah, that just like that first day of the conference really clarified like things I was thinking about in order to kind of, yeah, figure out what the argument was. So immensely productive.

JP:
Can I follow up on that? The two last points you made, which I think are related, that being in other people's language clarifies your own and also like imaginary interpolation, imminent interpolation, but imminent virtual interpolation. So the question is, do you think this is something that might be field-specific to those of us who are like novel-focused folks?

Because the novel is such a heteroglossic genre. Now, we might disagree about that and maybe we could argue about that. But like in other words, there's heteroglossia everywhere.

But the novel…..I buy the Bakhtinian account that since Notes from Underground, one of the things that makes novels interesting is that problem of the heteroglossic, even when it's interpolated. So I think Bakhtin points out that moment in which the narrator says, *this is still you talking.* In other words, we only hear one voice, but the voice that we hear is a voice that is confronting the interpolation, I guess.Any thoughts about that?

NM:
I don't know if it's a novel thing. I mean, like my paper was not about novels and was in fact a little bit about poetry. But yeah, I don't know if it's like what Voloshinov calls the multi-accentuality of the sign. I think it's more just hearing other people's verbs, honestly, or hearing just a simple distinction.

I feel like at some point someone made the distinction between reading with and against the grain. And that was like immediately for me, like, ah, that's the problem I've been having with this, not just this chapter, this whole book is like, I'm trying to reconstruct someone's narrative of the 19th century that involves reading with the grain.

I'm not good at that. I like to do ideology critique. I read against the grain. So that was again helpful for me. And OK, Williams is saying this and I need to just go with that. And I don't know, that was just super helpful.

JP:
can I just say I always thought that Voloshinov was just a pen name for Bakhtin and you made me Google it.

NM:
It is.

JP:
Oh, OK. So we're both quoting Bakhtin….

KM:

I was thinking when Nasser said, when he was talking to you about understanding, like when you give these, when you give this talk that people will understand it in a certain way. And that kind of idea of the fact that even when you feel like you're being incredibly, incredibly kind of clear about what your argument is, also understanding that there are like 40 different people in the room who are hearing the argument in 40 different ways.

And that to me is something that is always really illuminating about going to conferences, is chatting with people afterwards and hearing them actually say back to you what they felt like your argument was.

And the fact that it can be understood in such wildly different ways is miraculous, but also anxiety-inducing in a different way, right?

Where you kind of hear somebody say like, *this is what I heard you say.*
And you're like, *oh, my gosh*. Well, sometimes it's like, well*, that's the opposite of what I was trying to say.*

Or sometimes it's that they're hearing your emphasis or your excitement in a way that you didn't even understand it was there. I think I kept saying to everyone, this is a completely different project than what I did before.

And then when I was chatting with a lot of people afterwards*, the way that you're talking about kinship in this project is really, really interesting*--which is what my last project was about!

And I think that the sort of attentiveness to kinship structures is something that I don't even think about that I'm doing anymore when I do it, it's kind of formatted my brain. And so I didn't even understand how much I was foregrounding that in the project.

I thought I was emphasizing these other things. So just actually hearing your work reflected back to you and interpreted in such wildly different ways by the different people in the room, it can be it can make you understand what you need to actually, if there's something that you really don't want misunderstood, what you need to kind of clarify more, or it can actually help you to see that you're making claims that you don't even think of as claims because they're kind of coming so naturally because of the way that you tend to kind of approach material, the kind of patterns of your of your thinking.

So that was the part that was really helpful for me. I wasn't even hearing what I was saying to a certain degree.

JP:
So yeah, those conversations afterwards, I think are so helpful. And even can I say even the questions that people ask, because somebody asked me a kind of heuristic question about time travel as like a positive pedagogical element, which I mean, it absolutely makes sense, but it was so not where I was approaching it from.

Like that was a person who was like, you know, in a very forced, E.M Forster style “only connect” mode was like trying to think through, like what good this could do for their students. Do you remember it was the same person who gave the paper about millennial Disney and the uptake of different stories in the millennial period.

So clearly that is a professor who cares about, you know, finding relevance in time travel. And that is absolutely an aspect of the time travel story as I was presenting it, because I'm coming from a Menippean project.

In a way, it's almost the opposite of you, Kristin, because it's like for me that like the Menippean stuff is so baked in that I don't even think about emphasizing how satirical I think it is.

Because Ford Maddox Ford is not really showing you a great way to nostalgically recreate aspects of your past. He's more like, you know, looking at the disintegration of memory. But you know, it's totally possible to read that recuperatively too. And I was yeah, it was it was a good challenge for me to hear that.

Wait, Nasser, can I ask about your saying that the paper was new? Because I feel like that's an interesting aspect of this, because that corpora is not new for you.

This is your project: that paper comes out of something you've been thinking about for a long time. It's all in the quarry, the quarry in the George Eliot sense. But your point is this is a fresh vector. It's a fresh mind, a fresh cut.

NM:
Yeah, exactly. Like there's like I knew that this book would be in the book project, but I did not know it would be about Victorian Teutonism. I did not know it would be about stadialist progress at all. I knew like he has some shit to say about the 19th century and it's pretty like substantial.

And that was the extent of it. So each of these chapters writing has been like massively surprising because in each instance I find myself talking about something completely different than I thought it was going to be.

I thought this thing was going to be about a kind of like historicism in the nationalistic sense and this it's just way more statist than I thought it's actually also weirdly about race. So yeah, that was the surprise. And there's poetry, which is also terrifying.

JP:

And Nasser, can I ask how much you recognize the formulation of Kristin's which I completely recognize, which is that you that you discover when you give a paper, that there's like a very like Nasser way of doing things, you know, like that that kind of comes out.

Because somebody said to me afterwards, an old friend of mine who I really like, who did not like the paper, it was clear he didn't like the paper, but he said, oh, wow, that was *echt Plotz*. And I was like, okay, that's not a compliment, but it's like an astute observation.

It's like still running the same old train down the same old tracks.

NM:
Yeah, I don't know if I have a shtick. I mean, it certainly has become a shtick because I have the structure that works for the book. And so I was telling **Casey,** you've heard basically this paper before because the preamble is about the formation of Victorian studies and this counterpoint to it, this Caribbean counterpoint to it.

So that part feels like I present, and many people in the audience had heard bits of that before, but the Williams is all new. But I don't know if like the way I structure the argument, if that's, I don't know, some kind of shtick.

KM:
Your emerging shtick, right?

NM:
Maybe because we're mid-career we have an emerging shtick.

Emergent versus residual shticks.

JP:
Can I ask sort of a hard follow up about this, which maybe we could answer by thinking about the different conference climates we've been in? How much of what we're describing is imminent, like impending interpolation?

That is, it's a thing you do yourself because you're imagining some you. In the way that Wittgenstein puts a you in *Philosophical Investigations*, a you of convenience. He has the interlocutor who asks the question he just wants him

to ask. So how much of what we're describing is simply the fact of like other minds generally? How much of it is specific to, oh, this particular conference or maybe this sort of conference really, I don't know, brushes me against the grain in a good way.

KM:
Well, I hadn't been to this conference. Oh, you go ahead, Nasser. What were you saying?

NM:
I was going to say, I think it's specific to generally conferences, but it can also happen, I don't know, when you're prepping for class and you're like, *I know this student is going to have this kind of reading of it, so let me try and think of some way in which I can respond to it or frame it* or whatever. Those are also always incredibly illuminating for the text that you're reading in that moment because it gives it another balance or something.

So it's a cliche, but yeah, that's why teaching is actually beneficial for research because you're actually doing this work of research in the process.

JP:
But can I just push that a tiny bit more? That sounds like you're saying it's actually highly context-specific because thinking about your imagined undergraduate is what's provoking that thought as opposed to more like I'm under the gun, I got to have a thought. You're saying, *yeah, I'm imagining the 19-year-old.*

When you guys have given talks to, let's say, an audience, you didn't really have any idea what you're expecting.

NM:
I was just in front of a bunch of artists in Switzerland. I didn't know what the hell to expect. That was not actually that beneficial in what I was going to try and say.

In this case, I have a general sense and I have a sense that, I think, in the previous episode I was saying, I suspect I'm going to get a free pass on the Empire stuff and on the whatever. And thus, I know to like, I need to say

something a little bit, maybe a bit more provocative to get some pushback or whatever. Footnote, did not get any pushback, which was frustrating.

KM:
I'm going to ask so many rude questions the next time I hear you get to talk about it.

NM:
Yes, please. I work in a department where people fight all the time.

So when no one's pushing back, I'm like, secretly everyone's saying, Oh, Nasser, that was so good, blah, blah, and deep down, they're like, *what a moron, what a moron.*

JP:
I really love your point about if you don't know the audience, you get very little out of it. I really think that's true. I even think that's true about classes that once I wouldn't say I start teaching to specific students, but once I get a sense of the things that are like under the hood for different students intellectually, it really helps.

Like my science fiction class, I learned early on that like a couple of them had come from a Cli-Fi class which was based on like kind of policy-making decisions in the 1950s. That was so great because it meant you know there was like a gravity, there was like a planet I could torque around.

So and I agree with you about going, I mean I've never been to Switzerland, I've never spoken in Switzerland (I would mainly be thinking about the chocolate probably,) but I've spoken at the local library and I agree, it's like okay, I'll show some pictures and see who says what.

KM:

There are people that you do want to satisfy, because I think especially, I mean this was interesting because I was coming as an outsider to this conference, but it was also so lovely to see what an actual community this conference is, that it is a smaller regional organization, and it is a group of people who seem like they've truly been thinking in collaboration with one another for a long time, and that they've been part of one another's projects for a while. And

that's fantastic to see. I was really excited by that.

JP:
[Laughing] That's like the *Cranford* quality of Victorian Studies. I think it's good and it's bad. I have beloved friends in this world, that we talk about that all the time.

I mean, I think you can go a little too Cranford.

KM:

Too far, John. Cranford is too far.

NM:

Can I question the satisfying the audience? I feel like I don't want to satisfy like I want to some people to be, I guess, sort of satisfied, at least approving. But I actually want to dissatisfy the audience because I feel like, we're talking about shticks. One of my shticks is I do a little drive-by of like Christina Sharpe. And I'm always hoping that that will unsettle--that will be the thing that people push me on or whatever. And so the unsatisfying is actually, I think, also important or central even.

JP:

I 100% agree with that. I think it's a weakness of my own intellectual habitus, ethos, not habitus, ethos. I think it's a weakness that I don't, I know what you're saying. I hated being at Hopkins. I hated it. I really respect the minds of the people who can thrive in that situation.

I did not do well in that situation. I need more *Cranford*, I need more, I need, yeah. So you're totally right. You should not be trying to win your audience's approval.

You should be trying to construct a well-founded argument, intervention, discovery, whatever that they're going to have to reckon with. I think I just, I like it more if I feel like I can get people on my side. But you're right, it's a problem.

NM:

It's interesting to think about in relation to like Said's notion of the intellectual and exile, where he says exile is also metaphorical and so it's also dispositional, where you always want to be restless and very kind of almost paranoid about like consensus and always troubling that.

JP:
Can I, if we don't have anything else to say on this topic, can I go to the last topic, which is the things that might have happened? I'm going to call this like the unlikely Venn diagram, which is other things that happened at the conference that were just sparks that were struck unexpectedly.

KM:
Well, I think somebody said to me that they were amazed by how many connections there were between our three papers, which I thought was really, really interesting. I was like, we did chat before, so that that could have something to do with it.

But the person who was talking to me said, no, but I've seen plenty of panels that were actually arranged as panels, like with the idea that they would be in conversation, and there weren't as many connections there. That was interesting.

I think the thing I was most excited by at the conference was just the work of the early career scholars that were presenting there. I was meeting people that I hadn't met before and having the opportunity to read some of their work afterwards. I had never met Jacob Romanoff. Is that how you say his last name?

It's so funny because I chatted with him a bunch during the conference and he's so lovely. Then I saw that he was doing an event for the NAFSA Empire and Colonialism Caucus because one of his essays just won an essay prize. They were talking about an essay that he wrote called Mediating Whiteness, Triangular Racialization and the Anglo-Indian Pickers.

I was like, I'm working on Ireland and India. This is about Ireland and India and racialization. I went to read it and I was just so struck by how amazing the work that he's doing is and how relevant it is to the things that I'm working

on. We wound up talking about a million other things. He didn't even mention the fact that he's doing this work that is so relevant to my own. But it was something that came out of the conference.

NM:
I think I'm constantly struck now when I go to conferences, just how sophisticated the work that the early career people are doing is and how much I need to be reading the new work that is coming out, because that's like going and reading his essay.

I was like, okay, this is the thing that I should have been reading at the very start of writing this paper. I think that is always the most helpful reminder to me, is when I go to these conferences is how I'm always, my mind is always blown by somebody who I've never seen give a paper before.

Then I need to be always turning my eye to the people who are the people who are just coming out of graduate programs or in postdoc positions who are doing this work that is so vital and interesting and engaging.

That final panel on the last day on misinterpretations of the Victorian canon, like it was Olivia Xu, Brandon Katzir and Julia Chin. That was a perfect, amazing panel.

It was taking misreadings, misinterpretations of Victorian literature, quote unquote misinterpretations in an array of different linguistic contexts and cultural context. That was massively illuminating for me and in large part because there's a presumption of frictionlessness of the global anglophone.

Here are instances in which you have Anna Tsing's notion of absolute friction and almost so much friction that it doesn't work at all.

All the papers were amazing. But for me, it was really helpful in thinking about what are the ways in which these Caribbean Victorianists, as it were, are producing accounts of the Victorian in which there is friction with our understanding of the period and where there isn't.

And for me, I wouldn't say they're misinterpretations. They are just reinventions or even in some cases, just inventions of that.

JP:

And for me, Olivia and I have been emailing because of the point about basic English and the kind of algorithmic quality of it. We were thinking about the computer program BASIC and just like the ways in which there are these 20th century fascinations with like principles of reduction and efficiency and how those are meant to integrate with the literary.So similarly productive.

I haven't figured out what the science fiction connection is, but I totally agree about the panel and that, you know, that's the thing I've kept thinking about definitely intellectually.

KM:

That was exactly one of the things that I had in mind when I was talking about that, where I was like, *wait, excuse me*? Wait, what is happening? What is this work? That also helps me to remain excited about the field, to see how much it is changed. How much happier graduate students they were.

JP:
It's amazing. But this is not actually my, the reason I asked this question is because I actually had a totally different intellectual experience, which I would love to discuss if you guys are game for it. And it was with you, Kristin, which is that you and I talked about Bobby Sands.

And that was really an illuminating conversation for me. So I just got back from Northern Ireland. I'd never been there before.

I have thought about the Problems, the Troubles and *Milkman*. And I've thought about Irish literature from a lot of different directions, but I had not seen the murals of Bobby Sands before.

And so you and one of our, I guess we shouldn't mention her by name, but one of our other beloved colleagues who does Irish studies were there, both fantastic people, you know, I mean, also like somebody who thinks about this stuff so deeply.

And you guys had such a different take on Bobby Sands than I did. And that was like jarring for me.

KM:
So, yeah. I mean, I think, I mean, part of that comes from, I think, you know, like, I grew up like Irish Catholic in the US, right? So we have a very specific take on the Troubles that I think can be somewhat politically reductive.

But yeah, I have gone to see those murals, right? And I did stand and weep before them.

But I think that, yeah, it was really interesting to hear your really, really differ--because I was thinking about that conversation for a while afterwards. Well, but yeah, did the conversations you had at the conference, like, alter your thinking about your initial response to that material at all or no?

JP:

Yeah, no. I mean, it just deepened my sense of, like, the, you know, the layer, the laminated layers by which, like, you know, conflicts and troubles get, you know, they continue and they continue because there's justice on, you know, the, you know, the principles of justice and the principles of living together are not always the same principles.

And, you know, like the challenge of even if even for those of us diasporically here in the United States, like looking at it from a distance, you know, figuring out like a logical way to see it, it doesn't seem clear to me.

Like, I'll tell you one thing that I was thinking about after our conversation is that I talked to a lot of other academics in America prior to going to Northern Ireland, not all of them Irish Catholic, by the way, though some of them, a fair number of them Irish Catholic. But also like I was thinking about like a kind of radical lefty Jewish academic I talked to whose sympathies are so strongly with not just with Sinn Fein, but I would say beyond Sinn Fein, you know, like that.

So not the Troubles as a problem of the past, but the troubles as like ongoing, you know, so it made me realize people, you know, I mean, it's a sort of basic point, but it's like, you know, historicism is kind of tricky, you know, like we think we're looking at something in a kind of removed and an abstract way, but we're all bringing our own issues to bear.

And it's not like I came out. It's not like I hope you didn't take from our conversation that I'm like in favor of the Protestant side or something. It's not that. It's more just like, I'm interested in how art gets deployed politically, you know, that's a really interesting topic.

KM:
I think and it's interesting. Well, I actually had a conversation with our colleague that we are not naming as well about the, you know, the fact that, I mean, like I was talking earlier about having to kind of like negotiate my attraction to writing about morally ambiguous situations. I mean, I think I also have to kind of think through my attraction to violence as a, as a, you know, a kind of form of political intervention, right?

And that I have a tendency to kind of get swept up in certain kinds of anti-colonial political rhetoric in a way that I could also learn to be, you know, more cautious about.

JP:
I met a few Protestants there who were trying to break out of that paradigm, like what it means to be a so-called left Protestant, or they're also called, they have an organization which I think is called Reclaiming the Enlightenment.

You know, they're looking to create a Protestant Northern Irish identity that isn't predicated on like wrapping yourself in the Union Jack. And so my hypothesis is that on some level, as like a lefty, somewhat Jewish identified person who struggles with this nightmare of Zionist ethno-nationalism, I actually have a lot of sympathy with the Protestants in Northern Ireland, if that makes sense, because they're in kind of quote the winner's position. And yet the people I met don't feel like winners, they feel like losers, they hate that situation and they want out of it.

But the situation continues. Does that make sense?

KM:

Yeah, no, I mean, I'm thinking through a lot of that. I mean, a lot of the people that I'm writing about who were who were drawn to the philosophy in Ireland were Irish Protestants, right? And I think like the kind of conventional way of thinking about that tendency has been that that these are figures who felt like they couldn't engage with particular strands of Irish Catholic national course.

So this became a way to kind of think themselves outside of their-- But I want to think more about what it is about theosophy specifically that attracts them and not just think of it as a as some sort of kind of like substitute for a Catholic identity.

But what is it about this particular occult practice that feels like it gives them access to thinking in community with anti-colonial figures both in Ireland and in India? Like what is it about that particular mode of spirituality and mysticism that makes them feel like they have now the kind of credentials to connect up with people who's who they want to be in political company with?

JP:
That's super fascinating because don't people make that argument about the Young Ireland movement too? Like you know that for people like Yeats and Lady Gregory. I assume Lady Gregory was Protestant, wasn't she?

KM:

Yeah; And Yeats had this kind of moment of this kind of theosophical moment as well. So I think that's why they've kind of put that on Yates and then kind of decided that all of these other figures like AE and James Cousins, right, that this is always what it's about, is about kind of being drawn to a way to kind of identify outside of an Irish Protestant background.

So I feel like I don't understand why it's Theosophy specifically that has this particular kind of political usefulness.And that's the thing that I think I want the project to think through more.

JP:

That's totally fascinating. We can't talk about Milkman, can we? But if we could talk about Milkman, I feel like one of the things in Milkman is that they're always looking for third spaces, right? Like whether like, you know,

Bombs Boy, the International Dancing Couple, and the Issues Ladies, is that what they're called? Like in *Milkman*, there's people who want some other way to identify rather than being in the polarized. I don't know, Nasser, you're the expert here. What do you think?

NM:
I'm the expert on Manichaeanism, I guess. I mean, I mean, Milkman, yeah, but the people want those third spaces, but the world historical context disallows those at every moment. And furthermore, that the horizon of politics is framed, in framed by that Manichaeanism.

And so while those are little possibilities and little spaces of it, it cannot amount to a kind of big P politics, it would seem, or I would argue, I guess I'm just like staying too close to like Fanon's first chapter in Wretched of the Earth.

JP:
Okay, burst my bubble, that's fine.

KM:

That's Nasser Shtick though.

KM:
That is fully my shtick. Literally teaching a class right now called Jerks, Naysayers and Killjoys.

JP:
Okay, well, I'm going to teach Reclaiming the Enlightenment. It's going to be all Protestant Irish thinkers.

So there, this is the moment in a conversation on Recall This Book where we literally do recall books. So based on this conversation and this question of, you know, why I panel, I'd just love to ask you guys each if you have a book you would like to recommend.

NM:

This is a conversation about the kind of critic and the sort of ambivalence that one feels with, let's say, historical context or with a certain audience and stuff. I mentioned it earlier, but Edward *Said's Representations of the Intellectual*, where he really articulates a version of what a secular critic is, I find to be super useful in thinking about any number of questions of politics or questions of field and discipline.

KM:
I don't have a specific book. I just have the fact of going and reading Jacob's essay after the conference, just to make me realize that when I go to conferences now, the thing that I want to do is whatever, the four and five papers I hear that completely blow my mind that are written by people that I haven't met before to go and actually read an article by them and to connect up with the new work that's happening in the field and really keep doing that. Because I think that, especially when you get really enmeshed in a book project, all I'm reading right now is weird, like theosophical pamphlets from 1926. I'm in such a weird rabbit hole right now. The thing that was so helpful for me there was to just get jarred out of thinking that my project is the only project in the world.

Because I'm on sabbatical, I'm feeling I'm completely detached and disconnected. But to just get into that practice of just making sure that when I hear the following up in that way, because I thought you would ask us a question about, do you take notes at conferences?

I do take notes at conferences. But one day, one of our colleagues, I'm going to name him by name, Dennis Dennisoff was watching me take these incredibly detailed notes at a conference.

He was like, *Kristin, do you ever go back and look at these notes after the conference?* No. He's like, *what are you doing?* But I think that in place of going back and consulting these notes that I'm taking that don't really make any sense, but just starring the four and five people whose papers I hear that kind of completely take my thinking in a new direction and actually taking the time to go and read something by them when I leave the conference is the thing that I just want to try to get into more of a practice of doing.

JP:

I'm really glad you mentioned that. I try to write up my notes the morning after, but after that I never look at them again, which is bad, bad, bad.

I'm going to make a plug for two Protestant Northern Irish books. I'm going to talk about *The Ghost Limb* by Claire Mitchell, which is also called, it has a wonderful subtitle. "Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798," and that came out recently.

Then also *The Lapsed Protestant* by Glenn Patterson, who's a wonderful Northern Irish novelist, but it's like a series of essays about the problems of being a Protestant. How can you be a Protestant and have a conscience, basically, is what he's struggling with.

KM:
Have you seen the Steve McLean film about Bobby Sands, *Hunger*? Have you watched that?

JP:

No, but Our Friend Who Shall Be Nameless recommended it to me.I really want to watch it.

KM:
It's so good. It's amazing. It really is It's almost a silent film.

It really is just like hours of watching him starve himself to death, and then there's a moment where a priest comes in and they have a conversation about why he's doing what he's doing, and that's like maybe 15 minutes of dialogue.

The majority of the film is just watching him really, really do the thing. It's one of my favorite movies.

JP:
Well, thank you.

KM:
That's my counter to those books.

JP:

Yeah, I know. I hear it. Kristin and Nasser, thank you guys so much. This has been a terrific conversation. I mean, come back. We'll do it again in 10 years or something.

KM:
Thank you so much. This was really great.

NM:

Thanks as well.

JP: Okay. And to all of you for listening. Bye-bye for now. Recall This Book is the creation of John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry. Sound editing is by Khimaya Bagla and music comes from a song by Eric Chaslow and Barbara Cassidy.

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