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## [Episode 102 – Belfast](#) (03/07/2017)

Transcription by Christabel Smith

Hosts: David Turner – **DT**

Guests:

Tara McEvoy – **TMc**

Padraig Regan – **PR**

Caitlyn Newby – **CN**

### **Part One/Introduction:**

**DT:** Hello, this is Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. Today, I'm in Belfast. Lizzy and I are visiting the fantastic Belfast Book Festival, which takes place mainly at the beautiful

Crescent Park centre, but also in other venues across the city. The trip and episode have been made possible by funding from Arts Council England, so a huge thank you to them. If you'd like to find out more about what we're up to, or have been up to, or to download a transcript of this episode, go over to [www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com](http://www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com).

Also, you can follow us at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook and Instagram, @Silent\_Tongue on Twitter. As always, you can subscribe to us on Soundcloud, iTunes for Apple users, Stitcher for Android devices or just anywhere else you access your podcasts. This episode is in three parts. Later, we're going to hear from Matthew Rice and Women Aloud Northern Ireland, but first, I'm joined by some of the editors from The Tangerine, a new literary magazine based here in Belfast.

**TMc/PR/CN:** Hello.

**DT:** To start with, I'll allow you all to introduce yourselves and chat a bit about what you're doing and why.

**TMc:** Great. I'm Tara MeEvoy, I'm the editor of The Tangerine.

**CN:** I'm Caitlyn Newby, I'm the Poetry Editor.

**PR:** I'm Pdraig Regan and I'm the Contributing Editor of The Tangerine.

**DT:** Perfect. I want to start by saying it's beautiful. If you're in Belfast and anywhere near Botanic Gardens, you can go to No Alibis bookshop, which is on Botanic Avenue. That's a great bookshop in itself. Lizzy and I first saw The Tangerine in there and were both drawn to it and then we saw the showcase you put on last night as part of Belfast Book Festival. We should start by discussing why it started and why you felt there was a need for it.

**PR:** Tara and I had been friends for years and for quite a few years, we'd said in the abstract, one day, we would like to provide a literary magazine. There are some great magazines happening in the south of Ireland, Banshee Lit and The Stinging Fly, who were joining us in Belfast yesterday, but there really isn't anything similar in Belfast. There is the Irish Pages, which is something slightly different, and there was The Yellow Nib, which was edited from Queens University, but it is now continuing only as a digital platform and we felt there was a need for something like this here in the north of Ireland.

**DT:** Was that a need to reflect something happening here that's different to the rest of Ireland?

**TMc:** I think we're hoping to print a mixture of writers from Northern Ireland and also more internationally. In one sense, it was important for us to offer a platform to new writers working here, but also to get away from any insular outlook and try and push it further.

**DT:** Since this is a poetry podcast, we should direct this question to you, Caitlyn. Is there a definite theme or style you're looking for?

**CN:** There's no set theme stylewise. Definitely, I'm drawn to certain poems over others, but I try to read everything. There was over 200 submissions for the last issue, which was incredible, and there was a lot of variety. I'm drawn to interesting sound patterns and plays with words, poems from anywhere really, so I'm not trying to be constricted by anything.

**DT:** In terms of submissions, I know you haven't got a firm date set for the next submission window, but when it does open, how is that going to work? Is it the same for all sections of the magazine?

**CN:** It's the same for all sections and across every issue, yeah, so whenever we open our submission call, we'll put that out on social media and on our website, so if you check out [www.thetangerinemagazine.com](http://www.thetangerinemagazine.com), there will be information on submissions there.

**DT:** What kind of work are you looking for?

**PR:** We accept poetry, fiction and non-fiction as well. So far, we've had really, really huge amounts of submissions in fiction and poetry, but not as many in creative non-fiction. That's something I know Tara in particular is really interested in, promoting non-fiction as a literary genre.

**DT:** In terms of people getting hold of the magazine, do you have any stockists outside Northern Ireland?

**TMc:** We have magazines in Books Upstairs in Dublin at the minute, if you're in the south, and then we've got an online shop as well.

**DT:** Is there an online version or just print?

**CN:** It's just print. We're currently updating the website to put on some more content from each issue, a couple of pieces of poetry or some excerpts from prose.

**DT:** I know it's hard to explain, because it's only the second issue and there's a lot to grow, but it's nice to talk to people at the start of projects. We can maybe meet in a couple of years and see whether you stuck to it or not, and we'll hold you all personally accountable. I really love the magazine and I think people should check it out. This is a podcast based online and it shouldn't be London-based, hopefully we've got listeners in Ireland, so they'll be able to find a physical copy.

I just wanted to get you guys onto the episode to get a bit of exposure to the magazine, because it looks really beautiful and you seem to have some really great writers lined up, at least in the second issue, so I just wanted to give you a chance to tell people and I really enjoyed Belfast. So thank you for your time. It's a very short interview, but you have to pay for your own advertising, do you know what I mean? Next up, if I do my editing correctly, because again, I'm dangerously recording an intro before I've even begun to edit the episode, I think Matthew's coming up first.

So before Matthew comes up, I would like you to remember that we don't have a marketing budget, all podcasts rely on word-of-mouth recommendations. If you like what we do, please tell your friends and colleagues. Poetry needs your help. Thank you very much. Here, I hope, is Matthew.

**Part Two (06:28):**

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Matthew Rice – **MR**

**MR:** This is a poem, a strange little poem, called The Turtle. It was inspired by the Japanese folk tale of Urashimo Tarō.

The Turtle  
*after Urashimo Tarō*

One of the days I lost in childhood  
I have traced to the turtle  
that could see me coming along the beach  
and went into its shell.

I stood and watched its gleam  
and saw the light of things  
in the tamatebako-pattern.  
I tried to coax it out with a pebble,

but it was equal to such a gesture.  
I used soft words, and even sang a little,  
but there was no music in it.  
It remained patient in its shell the whole afternoon.

I returned with my old age  
among people unwilling to listen.

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**DT:** Thank you, Matthew, thank you very much. Thanks for joining us.

**MR:** Thank you for having me.

**DT:** How are you doing?

**MR:** I'm not doing too bad.

**DT:** We've just had some pancakes, which is amazing, the first time I've ever eaten vegan pancakes.

**MR:** Likewise.

**DT:** A bit of context for those people listening, I don't ramble too much about pancakes and bananas, we were just at an event for the Belfast Book Festival, which is called Poetry and Pancakes, in which you read with three others. Were they all Belfast-based poets?

**MR:** Yes. Paul Madden is originally from Bermuda. He lives, teaches, or has taught at the Seamus Heaney Centre in Belfast. Stephanie Conn, she'll be well-known in these parts, and Alice McCullough.

**DT:** So we met, I'm terrible with time, I can't remember, but you did a reading for the Squat Pen.

**MR:** The Squat Pen, yes.

**DT:** I'll give them a shout-out. They run a regular night in the North and Republic of Ireland, don't they? They combine poetry and music.

**MR:** Yup. The poets Ray Givens and Paul Jeffcott are the two guys that run that. They bring together established names and more up-and-coming names, they're yet to publish a full collection, of which I would fit into that bracket.

**DT:** I'm going to give them a quick plug, because I wouldn't have met you without them. Apparently, you can find them at The Squat Pen on Facebook, that's the easiest way to find them, they told me the other night. Because I've only seen you read a couple of times, I've read a few poems online this morning in preparation as well, we might start with an impression I got, you can tell me whether you agree or disagree, or see any relevance to what I'm saying. You can tell me if it's bollocks or not, but most of your poems made me think of quite old, still photographs. Does that resonate?

**MR:** I'm glad you got that impression, because I'm doing so many readings at the Festival, in a close proximity, I'm trying to put together little themes, so when I read the other night, Thursday night, it was more of a broader spectrum of my poems, but last night's reading was more personal. That's basically what I was trying to do, create a snapshot in the reader's mind, a snapshot of a snapshot if you like, which I think is what memories constitute.

**DT:** Does memory play a big part in your writing?

**MR:** Yes. Seamus Heaney said that, for him, about his poems, not that I'm aligning myself with Seamus Heaney, just to illustrate the point about memory, he said a lot of his poems come out of something remembered. Not that all my poems do that, of course I am interested in a lot of different things, but if I'm writing a personal poem, it normally stems

from a memory, or something remembered, or something I looked up that reminds me of something from my past.

**DT:** Do you feel any obligation to make them true memories or are they elaborations?

**MR:** That poem, *The Turtle*, I just read, I'm only gradually starting to figure out what that poem's about. That's not an experience I had. The turtle is more of a metaphor for maybe feeling out of place. It's more the sense of the poem than the actual words used in it.

**DT:** So, memories as feelings rather than focusing on fixed events.

**MR:** Yeah, it's kind of a way of bringing out a feeling or sense in yourself through something removed. I guess that's what quite a lot of poetry is about, really, finding your way in and out of feelings.

**DT:** How long has this been a theme in your writing? I'm 36 now.

**MR:** Likewise.

**DT:** I won't say I feel old then, because I don't want to make you feel old.

**MR:** You don't look 36.

**DT:** A lot of London poets now have a very good skin regime.

**MR:** Keatsian, but a healthy Keats.

**DT:** I'm constantly swimming in the Serpentine like Byron might have done. I've found myself more drawn - actually, I don't know if I'm more drawn to writing about memories in that way, or just seeing a connection more. How do you feel about that?

**MR:** About whether I'm drawn to writing about memories?

**DT:** I'm wondering whether I've seen it in your work because I'm more preoccupied with it.

**MR:** I think one of poetry's successes is if you can connect with somebody's writing as if it's ever happened to you, or you know what that person's getting at. I think an example, I mean we all know Seamus Heaney's early poems, I say early poems, but he wrote about his childhood right through his last collection, there's a poem called *Turkey Buzzards*, I was discussing this with Paul Madden earlier actually, by Paul Muldoon. He's writing about turkey buzzards and there's so much going on in it, but yet it's actually an elegy to his sister, who died of ovarian cancer.

Even though the language is so out there, and the images are so historical and abstract in a way, I know what he's getting at. The feeling is in the poem. So I'm kind of interested in that. I think if you can connect with that sense in a poem, of something remembered, or

something elegiac, in terms, it's an elegy to memory, poems and tribute, if you can connect to that, the poet's done his or her job. I think your points a valid one, I know exactly what you mean.

**DT:** I certainly got the impression there was a sadness in your poems, but not melancholic. Like an acceptance maybe.

**MR:** I've done quite a few poems that are quite heavy, heavy-going, historical(ly) based... They're not about death, but death would feature. I'm interested in the idea of dealing with the acceptance of death.

**DT:** Yours or the people around you?

**MR:** Both. Probably mostly my own. I was chatting earlier, someone was saying poems about death can be very uplifting as well. I find. Maybe that's just my strange take, but I think that word acceptance is an important word when you're writing about death or sadness or whatever.

**DT:** I've always had comments that maybe my writing is a bit dark. At best, melancholic, at worst, depressing. I always feel that if you're talking about those subjects and you're still around to talk about them, that's optimistic in itself, if you're still there to communicate those ideas.

**MR:** Exactly. Any poems I read about death have been memorable. Maybe I'm just interested in the memorable as well. You can celebrate it too.

**DT:** I don't know whether this bit will go in, but recently I've rejected a lot of work because I'm uncomfortable with this idea of writing with an idea to produce a body of work. I can't reconcile that with not particularly being interested in some sort of legacy. How do you view your position in that established idea of having a published legacy? Is that a main concern of yours?

**MR:** Something I'd like? Obviously when you write, you want people to read it. There's the old adage, firstly you write for yourself, then if anyone likes it, it's a bonus. I've been lucky enough that some people seem to like what I've written. I'd be lying if I didn't say that I would like to leave something behind. I think everyone who writes, as you know yourself, would like to leave something behind. Legacy would be a strong word, because I'm just starting out really.

I would like to have books published that people would like and I would be happy enough to leave behind when I shuffle off the mortal coil.

**DT:** This is coming from a position of me questioning whether I agree with those statements now. This is too self-indulgent. No, I'll leave that bit in... I've started a podcast and that's self-indulgent enough! This is actually where the confusion is lying in my head, because my main profession now is producing an archive of other people's work. What I do is based upon this idea of leaving an archive, perhaps a legacy, recording what's happening

in the moment, but trying to find a balance between doing that for other people and not being interested as much for my own work. I'm going to leave it there, because otherwise my trip to Belfast is going to be me trying to find myself on Cave Hill.

**MR:** You might struggle to find your true self in Belfast.

**DT:** I think we'll take another reading, please Matthew.

**MR:** Since we're talking about death and the exploration of it, I'll read one of that type of poems. It was the poet Theo Dorgan who actually gave me the confidence to read this poem in public more. I was always worried about how it would go over because of its themes. It's an exploration of the Greek myth of Atreus and Thyestes, the two feuding brothers that nothing good came out of.

It takes its cue from when I read a poem by Zbigniew Herbert, the late great Polish poet, he's got a lovely poem called Apollo and Marsyas, where he does the same thing, where the myth ends, he picks up from that and explores what happens after. So I guess I'm trying to do that. It's quite heavy-going, but since it fits in with a part of your conversation. I dedicated it to Zbigniew Herbert because I took my prompt from his poem.

Atreus and Thyestes

*in memoriam Zbigniew Herbert*

Wet-eyed and begging,  
Thyestes' sons are put under their uncle's  
blade. Clean-edged vengeance-giver,  
Atreus separates them into pieces,  
aiming carefully at the wrists  
to make a clean sever,  
and, at pains to preserve the dignity of the young faces,  
makes a good stroke at removing their heads.  
The heads and hands he'll cauterise  
and keep, holding in a single thought reason and grief.

And look, what a lavish feast he's laid on  
for his brother, who sits across  
eating under the illusion of truce,  
who, later, will take the long walk  
to the Oracle, red-eyed and sickened,  
through the honeysuckle hedges  
and high-sided hollows,  
stopping briefly along the way  
to tickle his throat with a feather;  
vomiting up his beloved children  
amid the indifferent, dipping swallows,  
the sweet scent of summer -  
how cruel the life that continues on.

The cooling breeze and carefree sway  
of high branches make playful shapes  
in the setting sun.

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**DT:** Thank you very much. I just realised what's going through my head. Because of my own self-obsession, I got caught in the idea of legacy. What stuck me was the other night when you were talking about this poet and Primo Levi, I've been reading a book at the moment by the poet Inua Ellams, it's a new anthology collection of memoirs, diaries, and poetry from Nine Arches and he did a 12-month residency at the Poetry Library.

He selected a poem from the year he was born until he turned 18 and he wrote a response to those poems. What I was thinking, rather than this idea about legacy, but this question of fitting into something, is what are your ideas? How do you see yourself fitting into that tradition in terms of responding to the context of poetry?

**MR:** Do I feel I have a particular voice that fits into the scene?

**DT:** Do you feel you have a personal obligation to recognise those that have influenced you?

**MR:** Certainly. I think it's very important to recognise anybody that's influenced you, because people will see it in your work. There's no point denying you're influenced by a certain poet or other. Herbert is a big influence of mine. I love Elizabeth Bishop's pared-back style. The language is loaded, yet pared back at the same time. I'm think specifically of poems like Brazil First Journey 1502, I think it is, Sestina, things like that. Finding your own voice in the light of your influences is important. What somebody might call making it new, if you like. I don't know if I do that, it's for other people to judge. Nobody's not influenced by someone, as you know yourself.

**DT:** It's the foreword to the book. It's called #Afterhours and that's because of the tradition of writing a poem after a certain poet or their poem and the foreword is an acceptance that there is no starting point. That's already happened, everything is just a response to something else.

**MR:** Funnily enough, we mentioned Muldoon. I was watching a reading he did in New York, it was on YouTube, he's got a poem called The Briefcase, it's about an eel-skin briefcase. He says quite unapologetically that he dedicated it to Seamus Heaney, because he felt Heaney was the eel poet. He makes the point that if you're going to write a poem with eels in it, you may as well recognise the guy that made it his own.

Likewise, if you're going to write a poem about a flea, you should maybe recognise in some way John Donne. Or if you're going to write a poem about a moose, in some way recognise Elizabeth Bishop. Very important to acknowledge your influences. I wouldn't have a problem with that.

**DT:** It still surprises me that there isn't more acknowledgement to influences. I've said this a lot of times on the podcast, but people may be listening for the first time. My background is as an art technician. I worked a lot with performance artists and pretty much the whole art form stands on context. Some of the work is so contextual, it's impenetrable, if you don't know what's coming before and what it's referencing. That's probably an extreme, I'm not advocating that poets move towards that there is something nice about realising and accepting, isn't there?

**MR:** Yeah. You talk about context, I gave a brief context to that last poem, but I think there's also a responsibility on the reader to seek out. If they don't understand what's behind a poem, to go and find out what's behind it and then read the poem again. Hopefully, the poem has enough power, it will prompt you to do that. That's always the hope, anyway. But I found out so much about history from reading poems, then going and looking up the context of that poem.

That Bishop poem that I mentioned there, Brazil 1502, made me want to go and read about the Portuguese/European colonisation of Brazil at that time. Poetry can be a learning tool as well.

**DT:** We recently had Raymond Antrobus on as a guest, whose debut pamphlet has come out, called *To Sweeten Bitter*. He talked at length about the influence of Derek Walcott. You go on and read Derek Walcott and then the whole world opens up.

**MR:** That's a good phrase, 'the whole world opens up'. That whole other world you weren't previously aware of.

**DT:** I'm going to have some t-shirts printed with that on them. We need to raise some money with this project, so we need some merch[andise] to put out.

**MR:** Is anybody out there listening?

**DT:** Time's ticking on so we should talk about where people can find you, check out your work and if you've got any readings coming up. Where's the best place for people to find you?

**MR:** I always say to people if you type in Matthew Rice Poet in Google, you'll find pretty much everything to date, so far on there. I've got a few readings coming up in the future. Neil Young, a poet originally from Belfast, who now lives in Aberdeen and edits a magazine called *The Poets Republic*, he has invited me over to give a reading on 12 August at the Blue Lamp, with the poet Maggie Gibson. I had the pleasure of reading with her in Glasgow in November last year. So I've got that coming up, if anyone's in the Aberdeen area who wants to drop in.

**DT:** We've got quite a few listeners in Scotland, actually. They seem to love a podcast. I was going to say something then, but it sounds really shitty. I always forget they can't see your face. The tone of your sarcasm is not always appreciated.

**MR:** It's that word context again. There's a reading in Armagh coming up in November as well, I think it's called Literary Lunchtime. It'll be me and two other poets, I'm yet to find out the whole details on that.

**DT:** Do you use social media?

**MR:** You can find me on Facebook, but it's kind of promoted by the people that really...

**DT:** By all means, when you have events coming up, share it with us on Twitter and we can share it.

**MR:** I'm on Twitter as well, @wordswritten.

**DT:** We'll put that link in the description for the audio. Thank you very much, Matthew, it's been a pleasure to chat to you. We'll finish with a poem please.

**MR:** I'll keep it a bit lighter to finish with. This is a poem selected by Luke Kennard for the recent Best in British and Irish Poets Anthology. He liked it and I like him, so I'll finish with this. Thanks for having me.

#### At the Lights

My friend says there are ways of seeing  
that can lift the veil from the world we see;  
that, when accessed, will crumble away the cityscape  
and show the reality behind the facade.  
She's been reading a book called *The School of Seers*.  
She's telling me this as we sit at the lights watching pedestrians

pass in front of the car from either side of the road,  
dovetailing into space with expressive vacancy,  
and I drift into thoughts of that opening battle sequence  
in Macbeth, the strings that accompany it.  
The sun's been in my eyes since we got in the car,  
and everything has a sun stain as I close my them tight

and allow the motes to melt into darkness.  
I open my eyes again and we're moving;  
my friend has gone silent. A single drop of rain  
triggers the automatic wipers.

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**DT:** Thank you very much.

#### Part Three (27:15):

Producer: David Turner – **DT**

Host: Lizzy Turner – **LT**

Guests: Anne McMaster – **AMc** & Mary Montague – **MM**

**DT:** That was indeed Matthew Rice. Lucky me. Sorry to everyone for rambling on about my issues around legacy and context. It can be hard to keep your artistic turmoil out of conversations like this sometimes. Since recording the intro for this episode, the submission window for The Tangerine has opened, so if you have any poems, short stories, essays or photos and/or illustrations you'd like to submit, you have until July 14<sup>th</sup> to do so go over to [www.thetangerinemagazine.com](http://www.thetangerinemagazine.com) for more details. Link in the episode description.

I'll also use this opportunity to thank everyone involved at the Belfast Book Festival and the Crescent Arts Centre for making us feel so welcome during our trip to Belfast. If you'd like to find out about next year's Festival, go over to [www.belfastbookfestival.com](http://www.belfastbookfestival.com). Up next, Lizzy Turner talks to Anne McMaster about Women Aloud Northern Ireland.

The pair discuss the fantastic job that group does providing a platform for women writers and as an added treat, I've even shoehorned in a reading by Mary Montague into the middle of the conversation, because I'm very kind like that, even if I'm not very good at editing. Links to Women Aloud and Mary's work can be found in the episode description also. Here's Lizzy and Anne. Enjoy.

**AMc:** My name is Anne McMaster and I write a lot about the area that I have returned to live in and I am haunted by an old farm. This is called The Old Stone Wall.

**[The author has not given permission for this poem to be reproduced here.]**

**[0:30:20]**

**LT:** Thanks very much, Anne. Welcome to the podcast.

**AMc:** Thank you, thank you for having me.

**LT:** So you're here representing Women Aloud Northern Ireland.

**AMc:** I am, delightedly so, yes.

**LT:** Could you talk to us a little bit about the project?

**AMc:** Yes. Women Aloud is now well over a year old. We burst onto the scene on International Women's Day last year. We are the brainchild of an amazing lady called Jane Talbot and her aim in Women Aloud was the raise the profile of the women's writing scene

in Northern Ireland and that includes writers of all types. Poets, playwrights, novelists, short-story writers, spoken-word performers, you name it, if there's a woman doing it, Women Aloud will give them a chance to have a forum.

**LT:** As I understand it, the main part of the project took place on International Women's Day, was it the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March this year?

**AMc:** That's right. We had done the same in 2016 and in 2017, we are doing it even more.

**LT:** The reason we're here is for the Belfast Book Festival, so you've got events happening for this as well.

**AMc:** Yes, absolutely. The wonderful thing about Women Aloud is as I said, it's a forum for writers to get in contact, but it also allows us to keep in touch with all the projects that are happening. There are still poetry readings happening throughout the year, there are book launches, there are all numbers of things happening and Woman Aloud has created a forum to allow women to get in contact, find out what's happening and contribute.

We did a lot for International Women's Day this past year, we did a literary flashmob, there were readings, over 20 events over Northern Ireland, there were readings in libraries, book stores, arts venues. We also took part in a project called Women Across Borders at the very end of the week that included International Womens Day, where we travelled down to Dublin, reading on the train, and joined women writers in the Dublin area and in the environs at the Irish Writers Centre for a massive read-a-thon. That's exactly what we're going to be doing at the Belfast Book Festival, we're doing another read-a-thon.

**LT:** I was reading on your website about the aims of Women Aloud. The main one is to raise the profile of women writers, to get more women writing as well. Could you talk to us in a bit more detail about how you're going about reaching those aims?

**AMc:** Social media is a wonderful thing. We are able to stay connected, we're able to get in touch with... the women who write, who also contribute in so many ways, with creative-writing workshops, with poetry readings, with book launches, so we now have a connective network. I come from a very, very tiny rural area of Northern Ireland and as a writer, I felt, although I wasn't aware of it at the time, quite isolated, but with Women Aloud, I'm able to contact fellow poets, I've done interviews where I've suddenly discovered that the one lady sitting beside was the other science-fiction writer, who knew the other lady, who was the other single science-fiction writer in Northern Ireland. It's a wonderful network and that sense of connectivity is very strong.

**LT:** Have you noticed an increase in the number of people involved since last year?

**AMc:** Yes, we have this year around 150 women from our 260-plus community take part in things. That's absolutely fantastic. Whereas a year ago, I was sitting with a cup of coffee and a very distressed cat and a small book. Now I find I'm able to travel, I'm meeting people, I'm going to discussions, I'm listening to panel discussions, which are looking at the whole

nature of women and writing, looking at publishing, and I'm part of a really positive, supportive network.

**LT:** Am I right in thinking you've held events in every county in Northern Ireland?

**AMc:** As far as I'm aware, yes we have. There seems to be an incredible growth in the number of women who are welcoming the chance to join this community, because it reaches out, again social media's fantastic, by email. I meet people at book discussions and poetry readings that I've only known of through Facebook, because we're connected in that way. Then I get to meet the folk and ladies at the events, get caught up in what they're doing, and all of a sudden, my list of books to buy grows an awful lot longer.

**LT:** And you're encouraging people to hold their own events if there isn't anything close to them?

**AMc:** Yes, very much so. Women Aloud really broke into the consciousness of the Northern Ireland literary scene last year at International Women's Day, but there are continual poetry readings. I've been lucky enough that because I come from a borough area called Causeway Coast and Glens, it's well outside the Belfast area and we were able to liaise with Waterstones, our local book store in Coleraine, who are really supportive and we had in May, a great set of readings, where women from all over the borough were able to come forward and do readings.

One of the ladies has a book that's just about to be launched, others were reading from their poetry collections, others were reading short stories. Also we had writers who were absolutely new to the scene, reading for the first time. It was fantastic just to have that connection with everyone.

**LT:** How many of you are involved with the main organisation of events and discussion of how to reach your aims? Is everybody free to get involved with that side of things?

**AMc:** Very much so. Having said that, our driving force and our absolute core woman who is pushing right from the very front is Jane Talbot, who has been the inspiration behind this, the creator of this. There are some ladies who do take a chance to man sometimes the Twitter feed, to look after the Facebook page, when other people are away on projects and not available. As we are growing, we're beginning to look at how we're defined for the future and so I think the organisation is going to develop new areas to work in, new teams of people, but that sense of 'if you have an idea, please go and do it', has always been there.

**LT:** At this point, we will pause for a poetry reading.

**AMc:** No problem.

**MM:** My name is Mary Montague, I'm a poet and scientist by background. I have two collections, *Black Wolf on a White Plain*, published by Summer Palace Press and *Tribe*, published by Dedalus Press. My website is a Wordpress website, so it's just

marymontaguewritersite.wordpress.com. The first poem I'd like to read is a poem about exile and what sometimes we find when we go home. This poem is called;

### The Road Back

I wanted to go home  
but the road was unapproved —  
bollarded and cratered.

I wanted to go home  
but the fields, the hedgerows,  
were wired, booby-trapped.

After days, nights, creeping  
along unknown byways,  
endless checkpoints, detours,

red lights winking in the darkness,  
torches in my face, callous  
laughter behind the blinding light,

I finally reached the village.  
At the sight of me, Mrs Irvine  
scuttled inside, shut her front door.

The corner boys stared with blank  
hooded eyes, their mouths grim.  
When I got to the house, the door

gaped, the lock was broken. Everyone  
was gone. Inside, all was scattered,  
smashed. I picked my way

through the raid's aftermath.  
There were brute footprints —  
a thick ugly tread grimed

into the carpet, stamped  
onto the spilled linen. My mother's  
bridal crockery was in bits.

I staggered through the wreckage  
anchoring my mind on a cold  
injunction to feeling: *Later, later.*

After the kitchen, the back  
hall — its door intact. I found

the key in its usual place.

\*

I sat on the back step, thanking  
God for *leylandii*. I stared  
out at the untrimmed lawn,

the seeded heads, the common  
flowers. I lay myself down  
on a wild meadow. I stroked its fur.

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**MM:** The next poem I'd like to read, I wrote following a bereavement and it's called;

*3 Letterboy Road*

Now the house is bone-beautiful, laved, balmed.  
The smoothness of the blank and tranquil walls  
soothes my hand. Surfaces are scoured.  
Carpets steamed. Curtains are dry-cleaned,  
nets and linings washed; everything re-hung.  
Nicotine no longer haunts the air.  
The kitchen's blanched with sunshine.  
The burner hums. To visit now  
is near-relief – all smells warm, fresh,  
cared-for. I could not wash  
your body. I could not lay  
you out. But I have done this:  
I have left these rooms rinsed, empty  
and at rest; their bare grace full of light.

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**MM:** The next poem takes a slightly different direction. I was fortunate enough to be able to do a phd in ornithology and as a result, I learnt a lot about a group of extinct birds known as the enantiornithes from the Ancient Greek, literally meaning 'the opposite birds', which were the predominant species of birds during the Mesozoic, so I wrote this poem about them.

**[The author has not given permission for this poem to be reproduced here.]**

**[0:42:11]**

**MM:** The final poem I'd like to read is about a kitten that my partner and I got some months ago. He was a rescue kitten and he was very shy, so this poem is called;

Feral

Black as a witch's  
familiar: damned  
he knows himself to be –  
for the jade of his eyes floods  
with fear to a similar  
pitch. Sleek satin silk  
soft sheaths his needle-sharp  
teeth, his lash of claws  
defending against the touch  
that he shrinks from; longs for.  
He gleams between the shadows  
of the stairs' balustrade,  
glowers from under the sofa  
at threats lurking in shades,  
ambush yawning in spaces.  
He is a cower in the corner,  
a slink against the skirting.  
Terror flutters his flanks.

Nothing happens.

He's left alone.  
He is fed, given privacy.  
He sleeps with the exhaustion  
of the unremittingly vigilant.

Finally  
a toy mouse  
at the end of a toy fishing rod  
tempts him out

and then he lets himself  
let you  
approach;  
he lets himself –  
for the pause  
of a breath –  
be persuaded;  
you feel  
his hesitation,  
the surprise,  
that *Oh!*  
as he  
lets himself

be touched.  
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**MM:** Thank you.

**LT:** Thank you. So I'd like to continue by congratulating you on behalf of Women Aloud for the recent win of the Saboteur award.

**MM:** Oh thank you. We had an incredibly exciting night, where I think everyone I knew was on social media, and we were following Jane and then we were able to watch it live. One of our members of Women Aloud, Freya McClements received an award for Reviewer of the Year, if I'm correct. We were entered for a number of other categories, which we won in, which was absolutely fantastic, the Best Collaborative Work, for teaming up with female writers at the Irish Writers Centre and that was a Women Across Borders project and also we were nominated for and won the Best Wild Card.

**LT:** Yes, so you shared a space with Lunar Poetry Podcasts in the Best Wild Card category.

**MM:** We did, we did. I remember reading through the list and thinking: 'I've got to check everybody out'. Absolutely.

**LT:** We were very pleased for you that you won that.

**MM:** Thank you, that's so kind.

**LT:** Also, another project that we're part of, Poetry on The Picket Line, was shortlisted in the Best Collaborative category.

**MM:** I remember reading through that and seeing the asterix that marked it out as the Editors' choice and going: 'Wow, this looks interesting.' Absolutely.

**LT:** Could you talk to us a little bit more about the Women Across Borders project?

**MM:** This was a wonderful collaboration that allowed us to link in with not only women writers on the other side of the border, but a number of groups helped to make this actually occur. In that way, we had to look at thanking the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the National Lottery, Translink, as well as Jane Talbot. We had done, as I said, part of International Women's Day this year, we had done a flashmob and our literary flashmob took us to some of the lovely areas of Belfast that are either, say for example the Spirit of Belfast, a wonderful space, but we also moved to various bookshops and libraries, the Linen Hall library being one, but we ended up at Central station, which is one of our train stations.

We were there then at the end of the week, at an absolutely horrendous hour of the morning, to get the 8am Enterprise train to Dublin, again having linked in with Translink, we were able to do a reading, so we actually had a read-a-thon on the train itself going down to Dublin. Then we moved to the Irish Writers Centre, where there were a number of us, I

think we had something like 80 women from North and South, who took part in a read-a-thon. At the end of that, we moved outside to the wonderful, beautiful park area and we actually had a mass reading, where Jane, as it were, conducted us and genre by genre, the women began reading until everyone was reading. It was a fantastic experience.

**LT:** Brilliant. Is there a plan in place for how you're going to continue the project, get more women involved and spread the word? Have you got anything else coming up?

**MM:** Our members are very, very proactive at the moment at the Belfast Book Festival. Wherever we go and whatever we do, the emphasis and the general message is this is a group of women, if you are a writer and you're interested in writing and you're interested in reading your writing, sharing your writing, learning about publication, then Women Aloud is a really proactive group to join. As I said, we're doing a read-a-thon this coming Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June, 50 women are going to be reading from their work.

So we're there. We're keeping going, We're reaching out, we're involved in all of the counties in Northern Ireland. If somebody has an idea, they put it forward and things happen. It's the most wonderful thing. I don't even now how to describe this. It's encouraging creativity in a way I haven't seen for a long time. There are writers of all levels of experience and the sense of support that comes from within the group is absolutely fantastic.

**LT:** Perhaps we could talk a little bit about your own writing, how you got into writing poetry.

**MM:** I've ironically spent most of my working life as a lecturer in theatre and a playwright. When I began writing poems, I think I was probably five or six years old. I found them recently and I was absolutely horrified, because I was at the other end of the spectrum and age now from that, but I've written as long as I could hold a pen. It's a cliché but it's there. I lived and worked in America for a number of years, came back because of a family bereavement, a lot sooner from California than I thought I would actually have been coming back, because I had in effect emigrated.

I live on a very old, very rundown farm and when I returned to Northern Ireland, it was with a sense of respect of having travelled across most of the states and been totally in love with it, the sense of freedom, the sense of openness, every state was so different. It's a large, clumsy, forgiving country in many ways, but I came back to the most peaceful, silent, old-fashioned way of life that I possible could and I began writing again.

**LT:** Where can our listeners find your work and find out a bit more about you?

**MM:** At the moment, I am unpublished and I'm one of those writers who's just starting out. I've taken a strange career move, in that I took early retirement in order to be able to write full-time, so I'm working on it. I'm delighted to be able to take part in poetry readings and read-a-thons, I'm writing and submitting assiduously, I'm getting published and hopefully, I'm on my way.

**LT:** Perhaps we can have another reading to finish.

**MM:** I'd be delighted. The strange thing about living where I do live is that you see things in a different way. Time does very strange things, so I see the farm and the space and the rural area as it is now, I see it as I would like it to be and overlapping on that. I see it as it once was. I'm walking the roads that I walked as a kid, I'm moving round the farm that my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather built, I'm very much a farmer's daughter, so this is a very brief poem, it's called Walking Home From School.

My sisters and I had to walk about three-quarters of a mile home each day from primary school and because there were three of us, it usually ended up as two fighting against one. Because there were that number of us, it was a variable, you could have two different people fighting against once, it just depended on what mood was happening. This is called Walking Home From School.

**[The author has not given permission for this poem to be reproduced here.]**

**[0:51:42]**

**LT:** Lovely, thanks very much.

**MM:** My pleasure.

**LT:** And thanks for chatting to us.

**MM:** More than welcome, thank you so much.

**End of transcript.**