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[Episode 67: James Ross-Edwards](#) (Recorded, April 2016)

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: James Ross-Edwards – **JRE**

Transcript edited by David Turner – 17/01/17

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another 'Lunar Poetry Short'. Today I'm joined by James Ross-Edwards. Hello James, how are you doing?

JRE: Hi, yeah good. How's it going?

DT: Yeah, good. Let's start with reading and then we'll have some questions as usual, cheers.

JRE: Tim drank six stubbies on the back lawn, unbuttoned his Country Road chambray, held it proudly above his right shoulder. He turned — bare chested — to the rest of the lads, suggested that perhaps it was time this became a "lids off" party? Everyone laughed at the concept and four or five of the men got involved immediately, unbuttoning and pulling of their shirts and t-shirts. A chant off "Lids off! Lids off!" materialised amongst the shirtless, quickly gaining them more numbers. As the divide became more distinct, the chant changed to a more pointed "Lose your lid! Lose your lid!" directed at those still wearing shirts. One by one — some willing, some reluctant — lids were removed until the backyard was little more than beer containers, discarded shirts and bare chested best friends. The chant changed to "twirl your lid" — and the men picked up their shirts, spun them overhead like colourful cotton helicopters. The chant changed to "swap your lid," and the men exchanged shirts and paraded their costumes, spun through the garden like young thespian gods. The chant changed back to "lids off" and briefly tapering to let the men have a sip of beer or a wee by the back fence. Someone then started the chant "repurpose your lid" — and the men wore their shirts as pants and skirts and capes and bandanas. The chant changed to "worship your lid" and the men threw their shirts into a pile in the middle of the garden, leapt around them like a maypole. The chant changed to "sacrifice your lid," and the men piled the shirts onto the gas barbeque, danced around it — eyes wild with drink, torsos lit by moonlight — as the smoke rose and the coloured cotton and polyester blends flared with heat, melted together as one.

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DT: Cheers James.

JRE: Thanks.

DT: How're you doing?

JRE: Yeah alright, how's it going?

DT: Yeah good. I'm not very good at pretending we haven't been chatting. Obviously, we've already said hello.

JRE: We've done pleasantries already.

DT: So this is going to sound like we don't like each other. Which we do. I was just wondering how did you... Well first of all, how did you get into writing and what interests you?

JRE: Originally it was probably like I always like, did attention seeking things as a child- like as a... like at school or whatever when I got the opportunity. Mainly just trying to be funny. But I originally started writing stuff down properly when blogging started in like the early 2000s. I think, yeah I had like just basic shit like a blog where I'd just write about what I did that day or whatever. And then over time that evolved into like more telling stories and stuff. Yes, so I guess maybe 2004. Yeah.

DT: Okay. Because, obviously we met... Was it last summer?

JRE: No, I think you know I think I might have been... in 2014.

DT: Yeah '14, the summer of 2014 and we both started doing open-mics around the same time. Like going to [Spoken Word London](#) in Dalston. I was going to a few others but I think that's probably where we would have met.

JRE: Yeah definitely, I think. I remember you wrote... You graffitied your torso in text, eh.

DT: Yeah, it's funny you should mention attention seeking. I am that man. Yeah. I'll tell that story another time. Actually, I'm holding the pen I used and it was far sharper than... I should have practiced with another pen it was too sharp to be writing on my bare chest.

Obviously, we met at what are essentially spoken word or poetry nights but neither of us were really doing what a lot of people would have considered to be poetry. [**JRE:** No.] But you know, I'm not asking you to define what you do but are you, that worried about a definition between short stories or flash fiction or poetry?

JRE: Yeah. This, it's funny, the poetry thing because I never even... I never consider anything poetry that I'd done. It just felt like something that other people did. But then I guess going to the Spoken Word London... Then the first time I went I realised I was like shit, everyone here is poets doing poetry.

JRE: So, then I felt pressure to... So, then I wrote a few things that could maybe just class or pass as poetry just so I could do things at that night. But then I realised that 'whatever', it's all the same for poetry, it's just line breaks, isn't it?

DT: Yeah, I think it's just about... Well, I mean this isn't supposed to be pretentious. I honestly think if you call it poetry then it is. I still don't understand why people don't consider any form of prose writing to be poetry. I think it's quite a strange thing.

JRE: Well, just the frame it's in I guess. Like if you write a... I used to write a blog about pubs but they were really just stories and some are probably even looking back are more poems anyway and not necessarily even about the pubs. They just all had the title of a pub above them but then... So by definition they just were pub reviews whereas... They weren't

like that was just a frame they were in and you could just call them something different and say they were poems. You know, you can just call them whatever you want.

DT: Yeah, I mean my theory, I think I mentioned this to you before that your, you hold your notebooks in portrait when you're reading short stories and you hold them in landscape when you're reading poems. And I think that's the difference in your writing.

JRE: That checks out. Yeah that's, that's true actually. There's some variation if I flick through them now. I think it depends on how long they are. [**DT:** Yeah.] But yeah.

DT: So, maybe the shorter stuff maybe goes in as landscape. Yeah. It's more like making notes and jotting down ideas?

JRE: Yeah, it depends what's easier, because usually... It's quite pretentious, really carrying the notebooks because usually they're just shopping lists and crap. But, everything... I've typed everything first but then it just feels a bit lame holding an A4 printout on the stage. I guess like, maybe that's the definition of, 'proper poets' learn their stuff first?

DT: No, no! Actors learn lines. It's got nothing to do with poetry. Some really good poets learn their stuff but I don't think it's got anything to do with any definitions.

It terrifies me to try and learn lines so I don't bother. I mean everything... If I read... Anything I read properly I read from the page and if I'm not holding something I'm usually improvising. [**JRE:** Yeah.] Because I can't, I just can't learn lines.

JRE: I can't imagine it. Yeah. It's always so impressive to go to the nights around town and people have, not only like written something amazing and performed something amazing but they've, yeah, committed it to memory.

DT: Also, some people just have terrible memories and it's got no bearing on how well they write, some people just can't remember stuff. But, in terms of... Actually, in terms of that. Did you find yourself under any pressure when you started reading for the first time? Because, obviously... Actually, Spoken Word London, for those who don't know. You get quite a bit of experimentation with performance there, it's quite an experimental night.

JRE: Yeah. I was just like, firstly going there because... My accent should be pretty obvious I'm not from the UK but. I was just amazed because it was just round the corner from where I live... The variation of like people and styles. And yeah, just how... And how talented and like supportive and great everyone was.

I think I was originally because I was... I think at the time I was just reading old stuff. Like probably stuff about pubs. It's always stuff about pubs anyway. But I was like, worried that... My initial thought was like no one's going to understand what I'm talking about. But then I'm like everyone's talking stuff from their own peculiar world so yeah.

DT: Yeah. I've got a couple questions about pubs but maybe we'll take another reading before we go onto that.

JRE: Yeah. I've got some actual poems. Cool, these are some haikus about sub-district Rugby Union in Australia.

Tim got dropped for Mark
But then Mark's pelvis shattered,
And Tim was back in.

We called Bruce bruiser.
And we called Matt Smith, Matt Smith.
Cunts don't get nicknames.

When Garth's femur snapped
And the ambulance was late
We lit his Winfield's.

Then when Paul's heart broke,
He didn't talk about it,
He just got muscly.

Midweek beer? No chance.
He regrets marrying young.
Just like his father.

Coach Nixon presides
Wearing those denim trousers
That aren't really jeans.

Reds kicks like a star,
But He has social problems
And he can't tackle.

Pussy inspector.
That's what Matt says his job is.
Matt is 43.

Max smiles to himself
Looks up from the barbeque
Says something racist.

Tim's first to training
'Cos the pool shop he works at
Is just up the road.

Working crushed Damon
And then football crushed Damon
Then Kate crushed Damon.

There's good attention
And then there's bad attention.
Dave doesn't know this.

When it gets muddy
The Catagunya Oval
Smells like raw sewage.

When training's over
The beige Holden Apollo
Skids into the night.

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DT: Cheers. No one's made me laugh out loud before. I've always been able to control my laughter.

JRE: On the podcast?

DT: Yeah, I knew you'd do it to me.

JRE: Yes!

DT: Actually, one thing I will say about open-mic nights and Spoken Word London isn't different to this effect. I think if you... Because your delivery is obviously quite dry. People don't always know whether to laugh at you or not. Quite a lot, it was me just cackling at the back of the room, pissing myself.

Obviously, they were about... What is that? Amateur level rugby union?

JRE: Yes just like the suburbs... Really particular to the suburbs around where I grew up. Kind of, the crowd of... There's the people who move and go to the city and or move internationally or interstate or whatever. And then there's the people that stay and play on and fight on into their thirties. It's is about those guys.

DT: Yeah and those guys obviously pop up in the pub stuff as well that you write. Would it be lazy to say that you're critiquing that culture?

JRE: Sort of. I'm also one of those guys in a lot of ways. Yeah, I think it's... I don't know, I don't... I haven't really... I never started doing it intentionally but I'm just interested. I like writing about just like the guys and like the people I grew up around and with or just about things inspired by things I grew up with and just Australian I guess white male masculinity comes up a lot.

I guess it's all meant to be... It's more self-deprecating than anything.

DT: Yeah, I didn't mean it... It never sounds that attacking. It would just be interesting to know whether... Yeah, putting it plainly, if you're having a dig at them or not.

JRE: Oh definitely, but like more like... We're all fucking idiots, rather than 'you two'. Yeah, I think there's a lot of... There's, there's a lot there.

DT: It's quite an interesting mix to take writing in a poetic form and talking about those subjects. Especially the bits that, like, nicknames and... Annoyingly you have to say 'bantz' now, don't you? That particular way that men talk to each other. [**JRE:** Oh yes.] Sports playing men. And that's the thing, I really like playing sports it's just I wish I could do without any idiots around.

JRE: Yes it is... Yeah. Trying to maybe let's not call it art. But trying to make something out of that stuff that feels so far away from creativity.

DT: But it's something I've always maintained that that kind of like working class macho bullshit culture which is what I came from as well. So, if I ever have a go at it, I'm having a go at myself as well. [**JRE:** Yeah.] I think actually lends itself quite well to poetry because most of the way that those guys converse are in short little... You know you're not spending too long thinking about the joke about your mate's big head, are you? It fits quite well into a haiku.

JRE: Yeah, and there's a lot of like. There's a lot of subtlety to the way people, guys, men react talk to each other and communicate and like have affection for each other. Yeah.

DT: Do you think you'd be able to write in the style and about these subjects if you were still in Australia.

JRE: Yeah because that's it. Yeah. I don't know. I think probably less so. Like, I've definitely started writing more about, about more specifically Australian stuff since I've left. So, it is easier with the separation. I guess you can, yeah I guess you can view it from a distance rather than being frustrated.

DT: I don't know whether this is true or not but maybe if you were doing this kind of material in Australia maybe it would seem attacking then?

JRE: Yeah maybe. Maybe, I've never done any... I've only read out loud once in Australia. Where I'm from in Sydney which is... there's lots of brilliant stuff going on but I guess I was just never involved. I'm sure there's great stuff going on and I was just never involved in it when I was when I was back there.

But, those haikus. The ones I just read about the football, rugby they seem to go down pretty well. I don't know... Yeah I don't want to be... I wouldn't... I'd hate to be misconstrued as some sort of a snob with my own people.

DT: Because it can be dangerous taking those view points and doing them as poems isn't it? And not wanting to sound like a snob.

JRE: Yeah, you've got to... Yeah I was yeah... I don't want. .. Yeah please love me.

DT: So are you continuing writing with blogs, or?

JRE: I publish some stuff on a friends site, [New Albion Sports](#). I publish some short stories there every now and then but I'm trying to write something longer now. I spend most of my time doing that. Which is hard because it's good to get a little bit of positive validation every now and then if you're posting or putting stuff out, you get some people click like and you feel nice for a few seconds.

DT: I think social media definitely suits 'the poet' more than the novelist, doesn't it?

JRE: Definitely.

DT: Actually, we'll take another reading then we can talk about some longer form writing.

JRE: Dale at work reckoned the Four Corners exposé was a beat up. "It's not that bad, man." He said. "Cunts are just prejudiced against the delivery method."

Dale reckoned him and his mates have been doing it for years. And it was completely, one-hundred percent fine. "Technically it's not actually crystal meth anyway. It's basically just speed you can smoke."

Dale stayed awake for three days and decided that his dad was out to get him.

Dale's Dad was a cab driver and Dale suspected that instead of driving around making a living, his father had enlisted every Taxi's Combined driver in Sydney to run surveillance, communicating Dale's every movement back to base, via radio.

Dale managed to outsmart them all by locking himself in the bin room out of the back of the pub we both worked out. When Dale finally emerged, I drove him back to West Pennant Hills where he smoked cigarettes in the car with the windows down, because it was raining.

Dale got fired from the pub and soon after that he met someone and got married and had a baby daughter.

After that, Dale started spamming everyone on his Facebook to vote for it as the Hills District and Greater North West's most photogenic baby.

After that I clicked unfollow friend, and now I don't hear much of Dale.

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DT: Cheers. Actually, I wanted to talk about what you do for a living and how that informs your writing as well. **[JRE: Yeah.]** So, maybe you could explain?

JRE: Yes, I'm a copy writer. I work in the creative department of big advertising agencies. I say that because I finished one job and about to start another, so not a specific one at the moment. Yeah.

DT: The way you talk about your work is quite similar to the way you talk about macho culture in Australia, it must be... I think that's why I find what you write so funny because you're clearly having a go at yourself for being part of it all.

JRE: Yeah I guess. I don't know whether it's like... I just don't take my... I just don't take anything that seriously. Advertising I think... Advertising has some great things about it but it is like, fuck it, it's advertising! We could all be doing something more. I don't think there would be many people in advertising that would challenge that we could all be doing something slightly better with our time for the world, but yeah.

DT: Yeah, I quite like your [Twitter feed](#) because you say some funny things about this. I don't have a very good view towards advertising companies and you don't do anything to... It's good because it makes me feel like I'm right in all of my opinions, about people I don't know.

JRE: It's one of those things like, from a distance everyone seems like a bastard and then you get in closer and then you go, "oh yeah these people are all great!".

DT: You know, anyone that has a Fuss ball table in their office, AstroTurf and a hammock. **[JRE: Nerf-rifles.]** Can fuck right off.

So, do you want to go into a bit about what you are trying... The longer form writing you're trying to do? Or is it too early to talk about?

JRE: Yeah. I can talk a bit, I won't say too much because if I say too much I'll never finish it and then I'll have to listen to this later and cry. It's, I'm just trying to write a whole novel about... It's, I guess it's like similar to... Or it's not similar but it'll probably feel similar to the stuff that I've like read today.

It's about like a bored middle-class kid in the suburbs in Australia. There's a lot of, there's a lot of my crap in there. But trying to be a bit more interesting than my life was at that stage.

DT: [And how are you finding the process from moving to writing slightly longer stuff?

JRE: It's really hard like, I was saying before like. You can't just finish something quickly and put it on the internet and then have, you know, a few people read it and say that they like it and then that makes you feel good but it's good. It's been nice, I had a bit of time off in between jobs. I've been trying to write every day for quite a while but having a bit more time to do it. But yeah it's, it's really hard! I don't know how anyone does a novel.

DT: I can't think of anything worse.

JRE: It's impossible, like it's actually impossible. Yeah and in theory like it's exactly what I love doing and what I want to be doing but then I kind of hate doing it as well.

DT: Why did you take the leap towards writing a novel and not a collection of short stories?

JRE: I guess, I originally was just trying to start writing like, what in my head I imagined as the correct length short stories. Like what... The kind of short stories you see in, you know, McSweeney's or The New Yorker or London Review of Books or something. But that's really hard as well. And then...

JRE: I got two friends, writer friends and we all share stuff with each other and two of us are attempting to write novels. So, I think they kind of inspire me as well.

DT: I was going to say that. I think if you're going to attempt a novel you need people to share it with, don't you? Because you're not getting any sort of reaction immediately or even in the medium-term are you?

JRE: Yeah, and you need that. You know it's like a constant support network because you need to... It helps to have like... It helps to have someone that you can like whine like an entitled baby to, who... Like there's an agreement where you can do it back and forth rather than just at your loved ones or whatever.

DT: I think we all need to whine like entitled babies. It's sort of what this podcast is [JRE: Exactly!] A therapy session for people getting no love from the publishing world.

DT: That's good. Maybe we might wrap it up there. So, in terms of people checking out your work, they can do it through the New Albion website? I'll put the link under this but if you Google New Albion.

JRE: Yeah, www.newalbionsports.com/features and there's a big... All of my pieces have a big embarrassing illustration of me looking like a gladiator [DT: It's pretty hilarious.] And then there's some old stuff on [The Moderation Hotel dot com](http://TheModerationHotel.com), yeah. Then probably at Spoken Word London and other various events.

DT: Then if anyone's in town, you should go to Spoken Word London anyway because... It's every second week... It's on Facebook.

JRE: It's every week now actually. It's good especially if you do a job that can kind of suck your soul out a bit, if you can go there on a Wednesday night and sit towards the front in a seat. It's guaranteed to fill you with joy.

DT: It's free entry, just buy a drink and have some fun. Even though you're not going to have any fun because it's poetry. But relax and chill out in the basement. Also, at least once go to the club when it's open so you know what it's like when it's a night club.

JRE: Ah see, I still haven't been I've heard good things.

DT: Yeah. Cheers James.

JRE: Thanks David.

DT: Yeah. Get hold of James Ross-Edwards somewhere.

End of Transcript.