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### [Episode 71: Bryan Baker](#) (May 2016)

Host: Lizzy Palmer – LP

Guest: Bryan Baker – BB

Transcript edited by David Turner – 10/02/2017

#### **Conversation:**

**LP:** Hello, welcome to another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. I'm Lizzy Palmer and today I'll be chatting with poet and performer Bryan Baker who has joined me here at Lunar Podcast HQ on a beautiful May day. Hello Bryan.

**BB:** Hello.

**LP:** It is a lovely day so there are people outside shouting at each other, running around and drilling. So, if that makes it onto the recording, hopefully it'll just add an air of summer joviality and ambiance. So, to begin Brian I'd like to have your first poem if that's okay.

**BB:** Okay, it's called;

A central character complains about his author

The man in a trench coat enters the room  
on the first floor of a cheap hotel,  
it's dark, can't see a thing. There are two shots,  
that's all, no scream, a scream would be nice.  
A woman's I think would strike the right note.  
I dash into the room, it's empty and the window's open.  
Nice touch that, I gave her the thought  
it's not a thing she would come up with,  
her plots are pretty sloppy these days.  
I figure the bad guy has used the fire escape  
so I jump through the window, and fall.  
No fire escape. See what I mean?  
Smack into a big trash can.  
She's going through her gritty realism faze see,  
I've had to put up with this crap the last four novels.  
As I climb out light slides across the red brick wall,  
a car veers toward me, I jump and it misses.  
Now that's cinematic. She made an effort there.

So to the last chapter.  
A big beef of mine is I never get to sleep with the girl.  
It's inferred sure, so what! I think she get's jealous.  
It's tricky with femme fatals anyway.  
In her novels most get bumped off, or taken to jail.  
Get one on the side of the angels, this happens.  
I'd been brave, tough as as hell, and quite brilliant.  
I walk into her room,  
Blanche is in bed, she smiles her beautiful smile  
and throws back the duvet, she's naked.  
Turn the page and what does it say?  
The end?  
One more paragraph. Is that so much to ask?

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**LP:** Thank you. So, this will be interesting for me actually because I've seen you perform a lot of times but never actually spoken to you very much about your work itself; how you do it, what inspires you and things like that. So, I'm hoping that this will be an interesting

chat for us both. So, I'm just wondering to start with when you began writing poetry and how did it come about?

**BB:** It's just a gradual thing. It must be nineteen years ago and then I wrote for a while and then I stopped. It's always something that I was interested in but never quite got and then about four years later I started writing again. Then the engine got running and I just kept going.

**LP:** You couldn't shake it off?

**BB:** Yeah, that's one way to look at it.

**LP:** So do you now have a consistent writing process? If so, has this changed very much over the time that you have been writing?

**BB:** By process do you mean the mode of creating?

**LP:** Yeah.

**BB:** I guess there is two modes. One is I the idea and that's great, it's almost like a free poem and it just starts writing itself and you've just got to knock it into shape. The other thing is the thing is, when no ideas are coming and there's that itch to write and yet you've got nothing to write about. So, when that happens I just start writing, just anything. Just rubbish, "There's a white wall, a window. The tree's there".

I just keep writing and then maybe something happens right, keep writing and writing and try to find something inside that, "Well there's something there. I can do something with that". Then try and build that up, expand it then cut it back. Until there's something there and let that expand. Then something emerges but it's a long process and it's aggravating but when no ideas are coming that's a way to get writing.

**LP:** Yeah, I think that's the important thing actually, isn't it, when you have those times to just keep writing anything even if it's just rubbish or train of thought. Then hopefully it will lead onto something else.

**BB:** I think it's a bit like exercise, for example, say push-ups. If you have a long break then maybe you can only do a few but the more you do it, the more you can do. I think it gets the brain working and more receptive to ideas that maybe would have passed by if you weren't writing so much.

**LP:** Yeah definitely. I think that's something that a lot of writers seem to go through, a natural cycle of starting and stopping, but yeah I think if you leave the gaps too long then you can easily let it go for a bit too long, I find that anyway. It's good to just keep writing any old rubbish in between. It's good to just keep on doing the actual writing. That's what you do as a writer.

**BB:** You write.

**LP:** You write and if you're not writing? So maybe on that note we could have your second poem.

**BB:** Actually since you were asking about things that start me. I was in the park and I saw this bloke come flouncing around without his shirt on, kicking a ball in front of his mates. He'd obviously been to the gym a lot and wanted to show off. So, that's one of those free ideas, so that was the start of;

### Fitness

When I saw Tommy he looked like a greek god.  
I said hello mate you look like a greek god.  
He said I know I've been working out,  
You should try it.  
I said know what, think I will,  
and I did. Nothing extreme.  
I took stairs rather than the lift and  
every day did two push ups;  
with a rest between each one,  
I didn't want to get too strong;  
and I didn't nor did I become god like,  
but after a month I did look greek.

Which I don't mind, it's just that  
I'm subjected to lectures on fiscal prudence now.  
The other day a vast sum was payed into my account.

The institution that made the payment  
has the impression I'll pay it all back with interest;  
but times being what they are, it can go fuck itself.

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**LP:** Thank you. So how long have you been performing your poetry?

**BB:** About nine years, about that maybe longer.

**LP:** A good chunk of the time that you've been writing?

**BB:** Yeah.

**LP:** Have you noticed that that has had much impact on your actual writing itself? I mean, do you find that you approach it in a different way with performing in mind?

**BB:** No, I don't but I do think it is a good thing to do these readings and I do a lot and enjoy them. I think when you do that it makes me think, "I'm going to go to [\[Poetry\]](#) [Unplugged](#) and it'll be good to have something new". So I get my arse in gear and start

writing and it's a good prompt to write. It's also good just hearing other people reading, their approaches and the so many different ways of looking at it.

**LP:** Yeah, I think that can be really helpful with your own writing seeing what other people are doing. It definitely inspires me to get going again when I see people getting up there and doing it. I've not read for a long time now but I think it's definitely helpful to surround yourself with... I mean even if people are doing something different from what you're doing, I think to surround yourself with people who are doing or creating... I find, anyway, that that feeds the process. Would you say that that's the same for you?

**BB:** Yeah, I think when the groups of people come together, even if they're not all going out for a drink together. The more people there are together the more ideas there are going around there's a state of flux and things come out of it. It's like Cubism, Picasso and Braque just happened to meet... It would have probably happened anyway but it wouldn't have been as strong. I think often, it's not always listening to the poetry, sometimes it's the chat in the pub afterwards.

**LP:** Yes definitely. We often find actually, recording these interviews that the conversation that happens before and after the interview is just as interesting. People always say, "Oh why didn't we start recording then?" But yeah it obviously wouldn't work as a recording, just a general conversation.

**BB:** Yeah, we'll talk about the bank I robbed on the way here, afterwards.

**LP:** I'm interested to find out what other poets you're reading at the moment, whether you've got any recommendations for the listeners or if you just wanna talk about anything that you're enjoying particularly.

**BB:** I've got to recommend a novel I've just finished called Canada by Richard Ford, it's one of the best novels I've read in a long time. It's just bleak and beautifully written. I've been reading a guy called Alexander [INAUDIBLE]. He's an east-European poet and I'm sure he's dead now. Just really off-centre, fableistic, surreal, dark stuff. I've been enjoying that.

**LP:** Have you met a lot of people on the performance circuit, if you will, who you've stayed in touch with an whose work you've really got into?

**BB:** Yeah, there's a few that I admire. Michael Wyndham I think is excellent and Gareth Lewis who writes under the name Jacob Lewis. He's pretty dark as well. And Donall Dempsey, just for his exuberance. Have you heard him read?

**LP:** I haven't, no.

**BB:** He's a burly Irish guy with long grey hair and so much energy bouncing out. So, I'd say they're my top three.

**LP:** That's great. So, one thing I did want to ask you; a large part of the work that I've heard by you seems to be very autobiographical. I'm not sure if that's just the way that you

deliver it but I was wondering how necessary you think it is to embellish the truth? If these anecdotes are things you've really lived through in order to make a good poem?

**BB:** Well actually hardly of them are. Especially the earlier stuff. I think it's autobiography in the sense it's stuff I've been thinking about. I think sometimes someone can say something and I'll take that or it will be an exchange. And I'd think, oh that could have been something but that was further back [in time]. At the start, the writing was more what some people call 'dirty realism' and then as time has gone on it's gone a bit more off-centre. And as it's done that it has come further away from what I am or rather, my physical life.

I think poetry for me is, rather than examining things [but] to explore and just go where ever my mind or imagination takes me. You could say, similarly with painting... Say with naturalistic or realistic painting, you've always got gravity so everything has to be on the ground, it has a certain weight. With non-objective painting, there's no gravity, or there doesn't have to be so everything is free and you can do what you like.

I think as one distances oneself from, say, hard-realism you get more freedom. Then if you take away the laws of gravity or aspects of logic you have more freedom. Of course, that imposes its own rules because there always has to be an internal logic that any work of art work to work. That's about it, I'm more interested in exploring than examining.

**LP:** That's a really interesting point. Obviously, you're just a very good story-teller and I believe you. Perhaps we could have your third and final reading?

**BB:** It's called;

### The stunt

The director wanted me to do it which I wasn't happy about,  
I prefer to supervise these days.  
The scene called for me to jump from an open window.  
They only had boxes to land on, I wanted foam.  
We were behind schedule so I said fine,  
but this pissed me off, it was unprofessional.  
And I thought know what, I'll give em a little scare,  
I won't get up straight away, afterward I'll lay still.  
The actor had his close up, I stepped in, the camera behind me,  
the director called action I made the jump.

Then wait still, open one eye.  
It's not my point of view, but an overhead shot.  
I see an assistant shake me by the shoulder  
then look at the director; others rush over.  
I see this as from a crane shot now, it pulls further back.

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**LP:** Thank you. So, what have you got going on at the moment performance wise? Any events that you're booked for performing at? Any particular projects you're working on?

**BB:** Just working on the writing. I've got a performance coming up but that's in December at [Richmix](#). That's just a reading but until then just doing the open-mics.

**LP:** Yeah. And how often do you do the open-mics?

**BB:** Generally, I do one a week. Generally, [Poetry] Unplugged or I go to [Platform One](#), that's a good one. Or occasionally I go to [Beyond Words](#) which is a good bike ride up Gypsy Hill.

**LP:** That's everything. Thanks very much for listening. And see you later.

**End of transcript.**