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### [Episode 91: Matt Abbott; Catherine Madden](#) - (02/06/2016)

Transcript edited by David Turner – 10/02/2017

Producer: David Turner – **DT**

#### **Part One:**

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: [Matt Abbott](#) – **MA**

#### **Introduction:**

**DT:** Hello this is the Lunar Poetry Podcast, I'm David Turner. Today's episode is in two-parts. Coming up in the second half is Catherine Madden but first up is me chatting with the

founder of spoken word label [Nymphs and Thugs](#), Matt Abbott. We talk about Matt's influences such as music and politics and we also get into a north-south divide a bit; and the media's coverage of poetry still being too London-centric.

Links to Matt and Catherine's web presence can be found in the episode description. And if you want to keep up to date with everything that's going on with the podcasts, including us transcribing what's going to be eighty-percent of the archive, then you can follow us at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on [Facebook](#), Tumblr, [Soundcloud](#) or [iTunes](#) or [@Silent Tongue](#) on Twitter.

And if you like what we do and tell your friends yeah it helps a lot. Here's Matt.

### **Conversation:**

**MA:** This is;

#### 22 miles.

It's sunny enough to squint  
but there's a fairly decent breeze,  
so I do take off my jacket  
but I leave it on my knees,  
and the lads are urging -  
"pull up a stool!  
Come sit down and eat."  
I try to resist,  
but a penniless host  
will never admit defeat...

Jam baguettes and cigarettes  
and milk in little cartons.  
They ask which football team I support,  
and grimace when I say "Blyth Spartans."  
But still the conversation flows  
on buckets, chairs and stools.  
My only prior insight  
being articles in vestibules...

After lunch we pass the time  
with packs of cards dictating pride.  
The sun retreats, the breeze persists;  
we quickly scuttle inside.  
I lose my boots  
for this handmade house  
as Ethiopians brag.  
But the Eritreans take the lead,  
as I find myself sitting

on a Bradford City  
sleeping bag...

Claret and amber stripes  
beside a cockerel.  
The distance between my front door in Wakefield,  
and Bradford City's stadium,  
is 22 miles.  
The distance between this front door in Calais,  
and blissful British soil,  
is 22 miles.

This lad beside me:  
we share a birthday, a bed,  
a childlike enthusiasm  
for Leicester City's title chances,  
and a deep disdain for Theresa May.

Yesterday morning,  
I'd complained to myself  
about the guy on the MegaBus  
snoring for five whole hours.

The lad beside me  
counts himself lucky  
that it took him three months to get here:  
most of which spanning  
the Sahara desert  
in the boot of a car.

Out there, on the strip,  
It's a makeshift manmade Glastonbury.  
Rows of businesses  
from bookshops to barbers.  
First Aid comes from caravans  
with boxes of donations.

Every refugee you meet  
appears cheerful, and generous.  
Every freckled British face  
is a volunteer.

Police patrol perimeters with guns that need  
both hands,  
beneath barbed-wire fences  
that every language understands.  
Barbed-wire fences  
built by taxpayers  
in Britain;  
a message in a bottle  
that doesn't need to be written.

Midway through this game of cards,  
he taps me on my knee.  
With eye contact,  
I flinch through guilt  
from everything I see.  
He leans in  
and he asks me  
to gently justify.

The cards stop:  
and everybody  
waits for my reply.

The house succumbs to  
silence.  
He's not asking me as a journalist,  
or a lawyer.  
Just a person.

It's like Auschwitz has a waiting room.  
Or,  
human beings are being graded  
and these didn't make the cut.

These entrepreneurs;  
these bold, brave souls.  
Forced to flee from falling bombs  
to sit and rot,  
or gamble again.

I feel sick.  
And the longer I sit silent,  
the worse it gets.

22 miles.  
Thousands of lives.  
Zero answers.  
©Matt Abbott

**DT:** Thank you very much Matt. Thanks for joining us. How are you doing?

**MA:** Yeah good thank you. How about yourself?

**DT:** I'm alright. I've had this horrible cold for about, only about six weeks but I've recorded quite a lot in that time so for the next three months of podcasts I'm going to be grumbling into the microphone. But I'm alright, it's nice to meet up with people and chat. I think the best thing to do is probably start with a brief introduction.

**MA:** Yes. My name is Matt Abbott, I've been doing spoken word for ten years now. I actually started off on the local music scene so I came home from college one day and I heard John Cooper-Clarke. My Dad were playing a [John Cooper-Clarke](#) CD. And instantly it grabbed me because I'd always been obsessed with lyrics and I'd always fantasised about being the front-man in a band. But you know, had no viable option because I couldn't sing, I couldn't play guitar and so it was never really a reality. And then when I heard John Cooper-Clarke and I realised he did it in a musical arena, suddenly something lit up in my head.

So, I started asking my mates if I could introduce them, because all my mates were in bands and they were like, "Er, yeah". So, I started getting up and just doing poetry without asking permission. And instantly I recognised that I were obviously, relatively, good at it. Not like blowing me own trumpet but I knew it was something I was comfortable doing. So I built it up from there, then ended up funnily enough being in a band for a few years and we were fairly successful. Then that didn't work out so I've come back to poetry.

So now I do a lot of poetry events and literary events as well as the music and the political stuff but I'm very much from that, sort of like, anti-poet/outsider place if you know what I mean. Traditionally, so it's fun really straddling the two. Because I think poetry can be enjoyed by anybody really. It can be enjoyed at a music gig, it can be enjoyed at a festival, it can be enjoyed in a library. You know there's no need to label it really and I quite enjoy experimenting with that, if you know what I mean.

**DT:** Yeah, it's been great with the podcast, meeting such a varied group of writers. I've been lucky enough to, just myself, interview probably over seventy people just in a couple of years, you know to talk about their work. It's interesting the amount of people that I talk to that have come into it from a lyrical point of view. [**MA:** Yeah] Sometimes you can get side-tracked and talk about poetry as lyrics but it seems to be missing the point that hearing those people like John Cooper-Clarke and others along those lines... More what they're doing is showing you that poetry isn't as restricted as maybe you believed before isn't it, rather than linking it perhaps to music.

**MA:** Yeah absolutely yeah. There's a quote by Adrian Mitchell that says, "Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people" and I think it's just that... I mean from my experience, the stuff that we read in the anthologies in school, it's not that it were particularly bad... I mean in hindsight, you know, Seamus Heaney and that I like him. But at the same time it didn't grab you by the scruff of the neck and sort of light something up inside of you. Really at the time as a sixteen-year-old boy is not going to is it?

And I think it's people like John Cooper-Clarke that just present it in a completely different way and, sort of, speak to you on your level. I mean, obviously, everybody's level is different but for me he spoke to me on my level. It's just using own words musically isn't it I suppose.

**DT:** I'd adjust that quote and say, "Most people ignore poetry because most poetry publishers ignore most people". [**MA:** Yeah, that's true.] Because I think poetry doesn't... It can't ignore anyone can it, because there are so many voices involved. It would be like saying that music ignores people.

**MA:** Yeah of course yeah. That's it I suppose it's more, the poetry that people tend to consume or be exposed to, that's the difference I think. Most people say to me, "I don't like poetry, it's not for me. Poetry's not for me." And that's the thing, they won't even consider it because they just see as this elitist academic art form and it's just like you know... It's got a preconception that most people find horrific.

But I suppose it's the same with like jazz, for example, a lot of people have got an idea of jazz whereas actually, I love a load of jazz musicians. I don't know anything about jazz but it's silly to dismiss it. I'm having quite a lot of fun challenging preconceptions and I think the current UK spoken word scene seems to be reaching far and wide. You know from people on Instagram, people on YouTube, slam poetry... I mean I don't really like slam poetry but it is getting a lot of people involved.

**DT:** We should probably talk about, I was going to say side project but it's not a side project, it's a big part of your life. Your label that you've got going and your focus on pushing poetry towards a wider audience. Why is that important to you?

**MA:** I'm just... There's so many amazing things going on in the UK scene at the moment, around the country and I'm just really happy to shout about it. I'm so passionate about spoken word and I've seen the way that spoken word has affected people. In terms of people who've come to gigs and been really moved, people who've started writing, people who are artists. And I just think it's an amazingly powerful thing and I think 'a' it's not like... People don't really talk about their emotions as much as they should.

I think British people are quite uptight and reserved and I think poetry is a really vital arena for that. But also with everything that's going on politically and culturally I think it's a really important time to reflect and challenge and communicate. And I've got one foot in the London scene but the fact that I'm very active on the northern scene maybe brings a little bit more balance. A lot of publishers, blogs or whatever are great but obviously...

I think in terms of the top end it's quite London-centric in terms of exposure. And so it's nice just to have somebody that showcases... I'm not saying I'm the only one who does it but I want to increase the fact that there's so much going on in the north and in Scotland you know. So, it's just what I do. Every morning I don't think, "Oh, I've got to do my tweets today", I'm genuinely really passionate about doing it. And also, I like shouting and talking about and promoting stuff but I'm not very good at promoting myself. So, promoting other people through the label makes me feel less bad about promoting myself as well.

**DT:** I think it's important to focus on the fact that you are based in the north as well because there still is a vacuum around the country. And prizes and publishing commissions I think are still too London-centric. **[MA: Yeah, definitely]** The reason I put the Arts Council application in for money for this podcast was so that we could get around the country. Though, I'm saying that knowing full well that I've waited until someone from Wakefield has come to London before I got to talk to them!

But it is just travel chances and stuff. It's still too London centric and I think the more... One of these... Actually, maybe we should talk about that a bit. I think the more focus there is from outside media on spoken word I think the danger is that it's going to become a very urban thing again and, sort of, focus on Manchester and London and Birmingham perhaps a bit too heavily.

**MA:** Yeah yeah. Some of the best nights I've been to recently have been in Derby, Lincoln, Hull. These are genuinely places that aren't celebrated even up north like, and Scunthorpe as well. It's a real grass roots movement and it's almost like, the more grassroots it is the better it is. I know it sounds really weird and it sort of sounds a bit cliché but...

The whole beauty of spoken word is that anybody can do it. Like I mean, obviously don't get me wrong, it don't mean anybody's good but like it's such an accessible art form. Somebody can come to a spoken word night one month. See the poetry, think that's amazing and by the next month they've written their own poem and they're on the open-mic. And in places like Derby and Lincoln and Scunthorpe and Wakefield where I'm from, that's an amazing thing...

It empowers people and it gives people a voice where... I don't know, this might sound like a ridiculously tenuous link, but one of the reasons people voted [for] Brexit is because they just didn't feel like they had a voice. They didn't feel like they were relevant they felt like they were being ignored. They felt that they were being left behind.

Now obviously being left behind by the government is much more serious than being left behind by the poetry media, as such but it's giving people a voice. People don't... People do spoken word pieces now that are like political rants or socio-political rants, whatever, they don't even see it as poetry. They don't care, they've just got something to say. And it's places like that, where it's all the more important for poetry and spoken word to happen. Which as you say... That's where it sort of gets left behind but I think that's all the more important.

I think there's still a degree of snobbery from people who are entrenched in the poetry world. In terms of some of the new stuff that is spoken word and that is slam. I think there's a little bit snobbery where they don't take it seriously or they don't accept it. Like you know, some people won't even accept it if it rhymes. [DT: Yeah.] I know it sounds ridiculous but I think there's still a bit of a... Maybe that's why people don't like poetry, because they do get this sort of like snobby elitist impression from it, I don't know. But nobody thinks like that in Derby.

**DT:** I think, one of the problems with people staying in a city especially as big as London is, although there are far more opportunities to get your work read, you tend to get a more defined communal voice, I think. Whereas, if you start going out of these cities people don't have that preconceived idea of what the art form should be and perhaps try... Or not even try, not even consciously make that decision they just are themselves. You end up with richer forms of spoken word coming out of it.

**MA:** Yeah, absolutely right. I've spoken to quite a few poets on the London scene who've said that whenever they go up north are amazed at the variety. And I've sort of said it myself to an extent, a lot of the London nights... Obviously, the people who are maybe higher up on the ladder have got their own style but at that sort of entry level, open-mic level, there are a lot that sound very very similar.

**DT:** It can be hard sometimes being from London and voicing that opinion, though. Because I can remember I wrote... I'm not going to say where it was because I don't want to drag them into it. But I wrote a review of a night in a more rural setting and I was really pleasantly surprised by the night because I don't really like going to a lot... I go to a lot of open-mic poetry nights and it can be a bit draining.

I was really pleasantly surprised by it and I tried to voice that and on social media afterwards, not connected to the night, that's why I don't want to mention them. I saw some comments about, "London poet comes to the sticks and is surprised at the quality!" and that wasn't what I was saying, you know. It wasn't like... I know full well there's so much happening around the country and we don't get to see.

That's what I'm worried about, that it will just become... Along with the snobbery attached to dismissing spoken word. There's a lot of snobbery still in London about dismissing the rest of the country and that's where I think the link comes into play with politics as well [MA: Yeah] and people feeling like they're not listened to.

I suppose my reality is just that a lot of people around the country would dismiss a voice from London because they're used to it being an elitist view, you know. And that's the thing, I understand that, it's not my... It's not where it's coming from, from me but I understand how they feel.

**MA:** All these people have had is voices from London. [DT: Yeah exactly.] People really really now more than ever, especially up north are starting to revel in that, sort of like, local reference. It's hard to explain but like, somebody went viral, from Wakefield, somebody went viral recently with a poem that were just Yorkshire dialect. It's like people are really

starting to sort of... Yeah, maybe the north south divide, culturally is... People are trying to regain... Instead of trying to aspire to be 'London' people are trying to regain the local pride and sort of rebel and find their own voice.

**DT:** I talk to a lot of poets down here that have grown up or been heavily influenced by the Grime scene and it wasn't until hip-hop artists or rappers in London stopped trying to sound American. And tried to sound like they were from Bow or from Angel or where ever the scene was growing up that it really became something interesting.

And I think it is important for people to be able to find their own voice but I suppose you have to go through that transitional period of watching YouTube, you know, a big thing we were talking about just before... And you can't get away from her name, about how influential [Kate Tempest](#) has been [**MA:** Yeah] and her voice and her style has become repeated and copied. [**MA:** Massively, yeah.] But I think it's just as people find their own voice they need something to lean on.

**MA:** Yeah, I can't deny that when I first started I sounded like a John Cooper-Clarke rip-off. Absolutely. Like you say, you're discovering your own style by borrowing other people's styles until your own style is strong enough to come through aren't you, I suppose. Yeah absolutely.

**DT:** I sounded like [John Hegley](#) for a long time, because...

**MA:** Well that's not a bad thing!

**DT:** And then it wasn't until after a few months I realised what that voice was that I was doing. I couldn't work it out myself. We should talk about Nymphs & Thugs and how that project got started and the motivations behind it.

**MA:** My band, Skint and Demoralised... When we were dropped by Universal we signed to an indie label called Heist or Hit and I still sort of talk to them quite regularly. And I went to see them early last year because I was doing an Edinburgh show on my own, self-funded, paid Fringe show and I realised I sort of needed things to sell. And so we went in and said, "Look, would you be up for me releasing a spoken word album on your label?" and after about an hour or maybe two hours of talking we came out with the idea of having a spoken word record label as an 'imprint' on their label.

And it's mad that I'd never really thought about it before because I've gotten far more industry, sorry... Far more experience in the music industry than I have in the poetry industry. In terms of like promoting stuff, albums, artwork, gigs you know. And yeah it just sort of happened organically really it wasn't like a gradual... It just sort of happened almost by accident.

But I couldn't really announce the label with just my album being on it. So, I started approaching artists and [Louise Fazackerley](#) was the first artist that I approached and we released a double album for Louise. For the first couple of months I was still finding my way because I'd been involved with a label but I'd never run a label entirely on my own.

Then we released [Toria Garbutt's](#) album earlier this year with aid from a crowd-funding campaign and that enabled us to take it up a notch. And then we released [Selena Godden's](#) album recently and that's really really really taken things up a notch. Just in terms of getting our name out there, in terms of the amount of money I'm spending, the professionalism, just the nature of the projects we're doing.

It's growing really really nicely and I'm absolutely loving it. It was a side project to start off with, it was but now it's fifty percent of my time. Along with my own stuff, obviously, but that's not a bad thing that's really good. But I sort of realised earlier this year that as well as releasing albums and 'merch' or whatever I wanted us to become one of the national voices, just talking about the scene.

So we've got a quarterly zine which has reviews, interviews, gig-guides, a round-up of all the nights around the country and stuff like that. The Twitter feed, I think there's about eight or nine tweets every day and we alternate between promoting our stuff and promoting just news stories from around the world. Also I'm going to get guest writers to do blogs, you know anything that just shouts about what's going on in the spoken word world. It's absolutely brilliant, I love it.

I love having a vehicle to do it. If I did it as an individual, people would think I were sucking up to them or people would think I were doing it just to boost my own stuff but doing it through the label... Because there's a few of us now doing the writing, I think it's a really nice way to be able to do it really.

**DT:** I think what I quite like about your Twitter feed especially is that... And it's something I was trying to do all along with the podcast was that, although my voice is prominent because I interview most people... But on social media I always avoid using my own name. It's not supposed to be my opinion it's about sharing what's happening and I think you... It seems to be the approach that you take with...

**MA:** Yeah.

**DT:** I think for a long time. I say long time, at least a couple of months, I don't think I attached you with Nymphs & Thugs.

**MA:** Okay, that's good.

**DT:** Which I think is a really positive thing, [**MA:** Yeah] especially since... I have a particular issue with self-publishing which I won't go into because it's quite complicated and it's not that I dismiss it completely because I think it's a really powerful tool but I think it can be manipulated a bit too much.

**MA:** It can, yes it can.

**DT:** But I think it seems to me you're doing things in quite a nice way.

**MA:** Yeah, I know what you mean about the whole self-publishing thing, it is an odd one. And even I feel a bit odd about it, like you run a label and you're signed to it. The only way I'd get around it is, well I quite like the DIY approach and I was doing an Edinburgh show on my own and it made sense to have a CD for sale. Therefore, I put the CD out.

You know, I do quite like the DIY element but that in a way... I don't really promote my album as much as I should online because I don't really want it... The more albums we've got on there over the next few years that makes mine like ten percent of the catalogue instead of twenty-five percent of the catalogue, I'll be happy.

**DT:** I think one of the best things about this DIY approach is it's made a lot of publishers sit up and think, "Shit, we better raise our game a little bit, if we're to stay relevant and in control". You've got to be offering something more. If people can just go out and publish their own book... You know, if that's all you want is a book or a record by all means go out and do it, if that's what you want. So, I think at least it's encouraged industry a bit to think a bit more about what they're doing.

**MA:** Yeah absolutely. I think having the control is... Having creative control is really really important and that's something that I've experienced in various extremes over the years through the music industry. But then, I don't know, financially it can make more sense to do on your own, there's all kinds of reasons why you could do it. I just, I think a lot of poets love the idea of having a book or a CD but just wouldn't know where to start.

And I think it's only because I'd been in the music industry that I've got an idea of the mechanisms of it. And because I work seven days a week and I'm a bit silly and my head moves too quickly I've just got time to sit down and make it happen, you know I mean like. I don't have a social life because I'm not really interested in it whereas most people, quite rightly, have a social life so I sacrifice my social life to release things and that's alright, isn't it?

**DT:** Yeah I'm editing while people are having fun. Do you think that poetry in general, we'll use it as quite a broad term here, is too fixated on the idea of printing books?

**MA:** Yeah definitely, yeah. I mean, the whole point for me with setting up the label is... I got into poetry through listening to it. I got into poetry through listening to John Cooper-Clarke through listening to [Linton Kwesi Johnson](#), through listening to [Atilla the Stockbroker](#), through listening to you know, Salena Godden. That's how I got into it, so I just think if I'd come home from college that day and my dad had given me John Cooper-Clarke's book and said sit and read this. I probably would've enjoyed it but I don't think it would have changed my life.

And I just think it's a really really important way of experiencing it and certain poets are more suited to the page, certain poets are more suited to audio. I mean Salena Godden for example, I've just released her album, a lot of live recordings from festivals you really really get the essence of Salena. However, her Fishing in the Aftermath book is absolutely amazing, it's a wonderful book it's fantastic. So, it's not to say that they don't work on both formats I just saw that there were a bit of a gap in the market really.

**DT:** People often misunderstand the question if I mention it normally, I'm not dismissing books at all.

**MA:** Of course, yeah.

**DT:** So, we were talking about our background, so you moved in from music and my background is working as a technician for artists and putting together exhibitions. One of the big shocks, with coming over was that in terms of multimedia work... It basically doesn't really exist within poetry. You can point to a few examples where people are really capitalising on digital technology and different ways of displaying the work but I think it's such a tiny fraction of what's going on and it does surprise me. Do you feel there's any reason for that?

**MA:** I think it just seems to be the obvious and natural route to take, to publish a book. And I guess if you're an emerging poet and you find yourself on the bill supporting more established poets, they've got books. You see them with a book and think, "Well I want a book". Whenever I travel around the country and gigging and whatever, the first thing people say to me is, "So are you published then?"

That's just... That is the route. The obvious, natural route to take. Yeah it's a weird one really. But I mean, to be a professional poet or spoken word artist now you've got to be... You don't have to but it really helps to have a social media presence and if you're going to have a social media presence it really helps to have videos. Like you say it's weird.

I think people are catching up but if you look at [Hollie McNish](#), her videos have had millions of views. [Suli Breaks](#), his videos have had millions of views and so there are a couple of people that have been phenomenally successful, partly through it. But I think for most people. It just seems to be that you publish a book, it's just what you do.

**DT:** I think it was Tom Chivers from [Penned in the Margins](#), tweeted the other day that he went to some sort of digital media conference and there was a quote that; by 2022, eighty percent of all Internet traffic will be video based. [**MA:** Yeah.] And that's what I worry [about] that the whole thing again will just get left behind and ignored. I think people do need to take notice of those things because if you want people... I'm very interested in how we find an audience and I think it's... If people are ignoring poetry it's poetry's fault, it's not the audience's fault.

**MA:** Yeah. It just needs to find a new way to connect with people. You know like, if you hear people talking about a band, they'll be like, "Oh cool, I'll check them out on YouTube" they don't check them out on Spotify. Alright, if you're at a house party chances are you'll either be playing Spotify or YouTube but more often than not it's YouTube as opposed to Spotify.

It is that sort of like, it is all just video. But I mean, we're in the process of editing some videos I've done for Salena Godden. I've spent more on those two videos than I did publishing the actual CD itself, partly because I think that's what you need to do and partly

because it excites me and I just think it's a beautiful way to interpret it. So, this is a problem see, getting a properly, professionally done video costs a couple of hundred quid, most poets can't afford a couple of hundred quid.

Updating your Twitter account constantly, I mean I do it naturally just because I'm passionate about Twitter, I've been on Twitter since 2008. Most people struggle to update their Twitter account properly. It's having the time, it's knowing where to start, it's having the money to do it. Luke Wright's 360 trailer for Johnny Bevan, amazing but I don't know how much it cost but that... Most people would struggle to produce something like that and so that's the difficulty really.

Having said that if you look at Hollie McNish, most of her videos are filmed on a webcam, with a laptop to be fair. We've all got a smartphone on us and most smartphones are capable of filming a HD video that would be perfectly good enough for Youtube.

**DT:** I cannot believe we've got these objects. I can't believe it...

**MA:** They're filming feature films with iPhones now!

**DT:** I know. I can't believe that people are walking around with that much technology in their pockets, it blows my mind. Actually, briefly, before we take the second reading maybe you can explain how and why politics is so important in your work.

**MA:** I started writing when I was seventeen and at the time I was studying government and politics at sixth form. So, I was finding a political voice, sort of, just before I started finding a poetic voice if you know what I mean. So, and you know what it's like, when you're sixteen, seventeen you think you know everything don't you? I'd just got into Bill Hicks and...

I don't know, I'd been doing random gigs for probably only about two or three months, I mean I went down on a demo to London and on the way back I were chatting to a bloke who were organising a Love Music, Hate Racism gig and I said, "can come along and read my poetry?" And quite rightfully he said, "Oh god.

And they actually tried stopping me from doing it but I managed to like run onstage before one of the bands and did this anti-racism poem and it went down an absolute storm. And the stars just aligned in my head, it were like, "Obviously". And then I just started writing about politics it just happened organically because I were at that point in my life. It just seems, I don't know, I'm struggling...

I mean I've written that poem about Calais that I did earlier and I am writing about politics but I don't feel like I'm writing about it enough especially with 2016. I feel, personally, that I've got a duty and a responsibility to do it because I am a political activist outside of my poetry. I just think that's one of the things that poetry should do. I mean everyone's different, I'm not saying it's wrong if you don't. Escapism is just as important.

I'm a political person, I'm not pretending. I'm not putting politics in poetry because I think it might be cool. I just am a political person so... You've got to write about what you passionate about.

**DT:** Time's running on, I think we should take another reading.

**MA:** Okay. You'll be excited to know it's got a Spice Girls reference. It's called;

Say You'll Be There.

She'd prepared a pop filled playlist  
so they could walk hand in glove:  
avoiding life's congestion,  
through the back streets of nostalgia.

Four years, and a hundred miles;  
dual decades as distant strangers.  
But still they manage to reminisce  
on childhood's shared and sacred pleasures.

She remembers dancing  
to 'Don't Stop' by S Club 7,  
in the playing fields at St. Peter's  
with Zoë's bouncing ginger perm.  
He remembers rapping  
to 'Re-Rewind' by Artful Dodger,  
on the old abandoned railway track,  
the final day of term.

It took 2 hours and 20 minutes,  
but it was perfect.  
When she finished,  
with the twilight of the afternoon to spare,  
she contemplated filling out the label with a gel pen.  
It's his 29th birthday  
which he's dreaded now for weeks,  
but what better form of antidote,  
than travelling back through time...?

She skipped her tea;  
too nervous to eat.  
He'd said he'd be here at 7.  
She knew it'd be closer to half past,  
but at 6:15, she settled.  
His decision now defining  
her defiance or delusion.

She passed the time with cigarettes  
and neatly stacked the crap cassettes  
and watched the clock  
and made a drink  
and tried to sip it on the brink  
and checked her texts  
then checked again  
then downed her drink  
and checked again  
then tried to ring  
but it rang right through  
then tried again  
but it didn't ring once.

"Welcome to the O2 messaging service for  
07525364927."

She lingers by the mirror;  
leaves the voicemail sat recording.  
Mascara halted in its tracks,  
at 25 past 9.  
Protected cheeks bereft of freckles,  
and hair no longer drawn by Disney,  
but even with that wide eyed wonder,  
"where on God's earth is he?!"

Twenty years of wisdom,  
that should be there to guide her,  
merely arrive in hindsight,  
whilst wounds are getting wider.

The bedroom waits with baited breath.  
Her feet get cold,  
so she rummages for socks.  
A car pulls up:  
through naivety  
comes nervous nausea,  
but it's only Babs from 13B  
in her taxi back from bingo.  
Alone:  
well versed, well masked,  
and well past caring.

As she plays the final song,  
for the fifth time in a row,  
she aches to tiptoe down the hall  
and crawl between her parents.  
Longs for worries such as:

Mrs Roberts set us homework and I haven't done it,  
and last time she made me stand up in the middle of assembly.  
How come my dad always pick me up from parties  
before we've had the jelly and ice cream?  
And how come *my* school uniform is plain and maroon,  
whilst the other kids' are poster red, with the school's name embroidered?

Sink beneath the duvet,  
make a castle from the pillows,  
as the Spice Girls sing a serenade  
that resonates quite brutally.

A tentative request, that echoes through a lifetime:  
faithfully borrowed from *Now! 36* (side 1, track 1).

*Say you'll be there...*

*Say you'll be there...*

*Say you'll be there...*

©Matt Abbott

**DT:** Cheers Matt.

**MA:** Thanks for having us.

## **Part Two (30:30)**

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: [Catherine Madden](#) – **CM**

### **Conversation:**

**DT:** Next up is the poet and co-editor of The Grapevine Zine, Catherine Madden. We are chatting about how as writers we portray different identities in our writing, the influence that her job as a subtitler for TV has had on her writing and the motivations behind Grapevine. You can check out that new zine at [www.thegrapevinezine.com](http://www.thegrapevinezine.com). Here's Catherine.

**CM:** This is called;

2000 vs 2010 Winter Mash-Up- 2015 style

I

I am heading back to London

the waft of school dinner

my grandmother's birthday I

stomach turn but for the wrong

in a perpetual state of

me as there was

that can unexpectedly be

nothing to do with the

moment

I think about Frank

towards me with a satisfied

I tend to question my own desire

I'd stayed in bed

be attracted to him now when I've

to search for something to make

I don't know if psychoanalysing

depressed as I am I looked

generally leads me in the

the girls screaming and the

can't have him but does

here was Jean sitting on the wall

his intelligence delights me  
looking gullible perfect person  
get sad if I don't when he  
Alright Jeanette Lydia  
more than next to me he wraps  
I tried to ignore him but  
my waist he kisses and  
oh touchy today are you  
head on my shoulder my  
at me tediously I just stared at  
embarrassed he'll hear it  
splattered with mud obviously  
on the kitchen counter and  
his football boots were also  
me wet and nervous his  
blow in the wind presently his  
snow this is all very soppy  
was looking at him  
put I have only just broken  
he said before leaving me alone  
friend I no longer  
is because my mum and dad  
any other human being but  
it's my fault because I'm always

the women will be the  
isn't but I'm still worried I  
know best he probably  
I'm upset so I don't see why  
be able to look Albert in the  
not fair so I bully them to  
does he still like me in that  
I'd had enough of Lydia so  
day as the counter incident  
made lots of new friends  
duvet in the living room  
a wonderful story good use of  
he held my hand under  
brought the story to a more  
rendering me unable to  
make friends  
all under the pretence of  
or perhaps not a pretence perhaps  
friend's hand warm platonically  
know that something might

II

I sat on the playground wall  
after a brief weekend in Birkenhead  
hit my nose making my  
seem at the moment to be  
reasons I hugged my coat around  
excitement albeit one  
a chill in the air that had  
mixed with despair at any  
towards me with a satisfied  
a lot it's all very interesting  
look on his face I wished  
with harsh logic why would I be  
I slitted my eyes in order  
known him for almost three years  
miserable to make them as  
myself is a good idea it  
through the hoards of people  
direction thinking that I  
boys arguing over football  
can't have him  
the wall hugging himself and  
I want to see him all the time  
to bully

lies next to me in the bed  
jeered at me  
his arm all around  
couldn't help saying get lost  
strokes my hand, he rests his  
Jeannie he squealed smiling  
hearts beats so fast I'm  
him his school jumper was  
last time I saw him I was sitting  
from running through puddles  
he stood near me and it made me  
muddy his light brown hair  
eyes looked nice against the  
smirk faded when he saw I was  
but what can we done simply  
what are you staring at weirdo  
up with his housemate his  
the reason why I bully  
care for Albert more than  
are getting divorced I think  
it's not the done thing is it  
always naughty Mum said it  
most disapproving and they  
won't see one of them again

wouldn't do it anyway wouldn't  
other people be happy that's  
eye does he want to though  
make them miserable too  
way on Thursday same  
one day I joined a club and  
we were both lying under  
two narrators could you have  
my house of course and  
definate end maybe they could  
the duvet  
the house points  
breath normally but this was  
keeping my hand warm perhaps  
he actually wanted to keep his  
warm or perhaps we both  
be going on

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**DT:** Thank you very much.

**CM:** That's okay.

**DT:** Hello Catherine.

**CM:** Hello.

**DT:** Thank you very much for joining me, 'slash' us. The 'us' is whoever else is listening.

**CM:** Yes, the mysterious us.

**DT:** John Hegley recently called me out on who was 'we' when I said, "Thank you for joining us". It's very confusing.

**CM:** Was he looking around?

**DT:** I feel like a Premiership footballer caught watching the replay of my own... Trying to describe in the present, something that happened in the past.

**MA:** Or like someone from a reality TV show like, Geordie Shore or something?

**DT:** I am definitely more like someone in Geordie Shore! Actually, I would say I'm more like, The [Real] Housewives of Potomac or one of those other ones. Where it just handily cuts away to them and they're commenting on something that's happening in a really calm manner.

**CM:** Yes.

**DT:** And they're losing their shit in the scene.

**CM:** Yeah, it's quite a weird thing because they're speaking in present tense and it's like they're narrating their own life. Yeah, it's interesting.

**DT:** We'll come on to that later with the subtitling work actually, that must've been why it was in my head. Maybe you could just introduce yourself briefly and then we can have a chat?

**CM:** Okay. I'm Catherine Madden, I write poetry and fiction, I'm in the process of writing a novel but I'm sort of more focussing on poetry at the moment. I am a co-editor of [The Grapevine Zine](#), which is a new literary zine that I'm doing with my friends. And I'm kind of interested in like identity and desire and relationships in general.

**DT:** So the piece you just read, how did that come about?

**CM:** So, I made that by... I was kind of like looking through my old notebooks and then I was also looking for a workbook that I had when I was in year six. And then there's like a story in there that I'd written which is about somebody getting bullied and it was from two points of view. It was from the point of view of the bully and the point of view of the person who was getting bullied and I switch the perspective on it.

And then I was looking through a notebook from 2010 and there was a description of me fancying someone. And then I, sort of, just thought it would be interesting if I didn't alter

the words at all but just took the first line of each one and intersected it. So, the first line of the story from when I was ten [years old], I put that and then the second line from the thing from when I was twenty [years old] put that in underneath. That's the reason it's in two sections because it's the alternate... And they both happened to be in the winter and then I did that last winter and now I'm reading it now this winter.

**DT:** Does it have to be cold for you to write?

**CM:** Yeah yeah yeah.

**DT:** Chilled to the bones!

**CM:** Yeah, chilled to my soul. And I guess part of the reason why I did that was because I thought it would be fun and interesting and also, I guess then reflecting on it. I don't know, when you're thinking about your own identity and your narratives in your life and how sometimes you kind of create narratives that perhaps aren't there. And it's like, "Have I been the same person throughout my whole life?" And has there been ongoing themes?

**CM:** And so that was kind of interesting for me to think, how was I the same when I was ten and then when I was twenty and how does that relate to it being winter and how does that relate to my writing as well? So, that was kind of what that was about.

**DT:** It's interesting the way that you can play around with... So, my sibling has recently gone to six-form, so they are sixteen years old. It just made me think a lot about these changes in your life about having the opportunity to reinvent yourself. I'm not suggesting that's what they're doing, it's just that you get the chance to become an adult suddenly and you're in a new situation. Am I reading too much into it, suggesting that there's maybe a link with the changing of each year and how this piece has come about?

**CM:** No, no that's definitely it. I sometimes feel like you know that you present so many ideas of yourself. I don't know if you do that?

**DT:** Yes, absolutely.

**CM:** Sometimes that freaks me out because I'm like, "Well what's the real me?" and I guess it doesn't really matter. I feel like I have very different sides of my personality that I present to different people.

**DT:** I think I'd like to see more writers embrace that side of things. It's a really beautiful thing to be able to do, to reinvent yourself. I don't think it's deceptive or deceitful in any way. I think it's a really important thing to... Unless you're writing pure and experimental, free-running stuff, you know, we're sort of looking at ourselves constantly aren't we. **[CM:** Yeah.] You know you'd be a liar if you were a poet and said you didn't care what anyone felt about you came across.

**CM:** Yeah well, that's the thing, because sometimes I'm like that oh well... People are going to think I'm acting not myself around them or something. Whereas myself is all of these things. So maybe that's kind of a little bit...

**DT:** How conscious were you with that piece of how you might come across and how it would read? Because sometimes if you do go through like a true 'mash-up', as it states in the title there, where you're just combining two texts... I've sometimes found it's quite hard to just truly do that without trying to write in your own narrative.

**CM:** Yeah, I was worried about that, I was like well maybe people aren't really going to be interested in reading this or listening to it. But so, then I just did it so... I don't know, I guess when I was reading, the way I intonate or kind of put my meaning on it... And that's another thing that I was kind of interested about when I wrote that, is that...

**CM:** Because I'm always thinking about poetry and why people are interested in it, why am I writing it, why do people want to read it. And a lot of it comes down to [the fact] that actually nothing really means anything and people put their own meaning on things. So, I kind of felt like I was exaggerating that there, so that these are like... A lot of the words that run onto each other just don't, they're just random. So, the meaning isn't explicitly there and perhaps there isn't a meaning. So, then when I read it I put intonations on it so it sounds....

**DT:** I was going to ask. Have you read it live many times?

**CM:** I haven't but I have made a little video of it and read it. But no I haven't read it at a reading.

**DT:** There's a [video](#) of that on your blog isn't there?

**CM:** Yeah yeah.

**DT:** Because I'd definitely heard it before so that must have been where I'd seen it.

**CM:** Maybe I shouldn't have read that one again.

**DT:** Not at all, it's nice to hear the differences between the two. I think that's what's nice about those kinds of texts they leave a lot of interpretation, live.

**CM:** Well that's what I was thinking. So, then if somebody else was to read it, written down, perhaps they'd have their own interpretation.

**DT:** I suppose it feeds back into that whole idea of being able to get different interpretations from that kind of text as well [**CM:** Yeah] and then it can be a different thing every time you present it.

**CM:** Yeah and then I think that's more generous as well to people because even though it's very explicitly about me perhaps but I'm trying to make it not just about me. These are,

you know, words are everyone's and whatever associations you have with these words, even though they were from my intimate journals and not so intimate book that I had in year six, they're now for whoever wants to read them. If you want to, you don't have to!

**DT:** You should be more narcissistic everyone should definitely read everything you write. You should tell them outright.

**CM:** Yeah, read this!

**DT:** Maybe we could talk a bit about the zine? The Grapevine Zine. How that came about and the purpose behind it.

**CM:** That was me and my two friends Jess Andrews and Jezebel Mansell and then Louise Evans who I did my little book project with, she's a designer and illustrator. She's really good and she's doing the design for the zine. Me and Jess and Jezebel did a Master's [degree] together but we were into the same kind of writing and also when we were on our Masters we did this little uni magazine as well. So, we thought we had the experience of collecting submissions and knew how that worked and so we were like, "Let's just do our own one".

**DT:** Is there any particular theme?

**CM:** No, it's like literature and we want to make it really as accessible as possible. I don't know, we're trying to collect submissions from people that perhaps wouldn't feel comfortable with submitting. But I don't know, I feel like we need to work on that more to try and... Like we don't just want it to be posh white guys.

**DT:** This month's [December 2016] [feature podcast](#) hosted by the fantastic [Harry Giles](#) is about accessibility, mainly at public events and how people putting on live events can make their stuff more accessible and what that term means, to be accessible. Often it's misunderstood or misused. Just because you've got a wheelchair ramp, that means your event is accessible.

**CM:** Yeah, right.

**DT:** But I think the lessons from that were mainly around... If you don't, yourself, know how to advertise to certain groups of people you need to approach them first and ask. I think it's quite a valuable... Having run a night, myself, and I obviously run these podcasts... I want people to listen. Maybe an idea is having at the beginning some sort of invitation process where you invite people because then it's very clear that your zine is meant for these voices. Then it's clear you're not just blankly asking people to send in [poems].

**CM:** That's a good idea.

**DT:** You're asking for an enormous amount of trust from people aren't you, that's the thing.

**CM:** Yeah yeah.

**DT:** And part of the accessibility thing is that you're going to have PDF versions available to download.

**CM:** Yeah. We're thinking that we might try and do actual physical copies in the future but we're kind of like just seeing how it goes. I guess we don't really know exactly what we're doing but we're just giving it a go and seeing.

**DT:** I think PDF versions are a really great idea. I suppose nothing is truly accessible to everyone so I don't know if you can strive for that... There is an issue of people not having access to digital devices and not being able to access PDFs but I think in the main, PDF versions are really good, they're really easy to carry around with you. Maybe we can take a second reading before we chat further?

**CM:** Yeah. This one is called;

Michael Cera is my celeb crush

Michael Cera is my celeb crush

du jour

I go to bed with him

around my head

protecting me

fuzzily

from all evil

especially terrorism

and then

counter terrorism

and then

late capitalism

in general I dream of his

unsure qualities and

wake up calm

and thirsty.

This is what happens when  
my non-Michael Cera friends aren't here  
I Google  
Michael Cera hot  
Michael Cera girlfriend?  
Michael Cera asshole?  
Michael Cera sex scenes  
which soak my algorithms in  
honey haired  
inexperienced visions of  
Michael Cera  
help.

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**DT:** Thank you very much. Have you seen the [Saturday Night Live](#) sketches about Zooey Deschanel with Michael Cera as her best friend in the kitchen?

**CM:** No I haven't seen those!

**DT:** So the sketches are called, Being Quirky with Zooey Deschanel but Michael Cera is in the background all the time. Like getting her juice and stuff. The impressions are fantastic, I really like Michael Cera. It's not a horrible impression of them, it's just funny.

**CM:** Okay.

**DT:** It's more laughing at the roles they play. You should definitely check that out.

**CM:** Yeah, I will do.

**DT:** I think I'd like to talk about your job at the moment, subtitling and this idea of being caught in between listening live to something but then reporting on it with a slight delay...

Actually, maybe my first question about that would be; has it in any way informed your writing since you've been doing it?

**CM:** I have been wondering about that ever since I started there I was like. "I wonder if this is going to inform my writing". And I think maybe it's kind of helped with making a sort of brevity to things because a lot of the time when you're doing it live you have to edit it a little bit so that it's... As long as you're getting the same message across, but you cut out the 'ers' you cut out the 'ums'. Also, people don't really speak in... You probably will know from transcribing that people don't speak in written sentences.

**DT:** No they don't! I definitely don't!

**CM:** I don't either! Like, people start sentences and then they'll stop and then change it and in your brain, you edit that out when you're speaking to people. Which is kind of what I knew anyway from writing but it helped with knowing what things are really important and that pack a punch, kind of thing. Which is, kind of, what I want to do with poetry anyway.

So recently when I've been writing poetry I have been trying to cut out all the stuff that I don't need, even more so than usual. So, it's just like emotive words listed on a page instead. So, I think that maybe the subtitling has kind of helped with that or just exercised my skill at doing that.

**DT:** Yeah, I mean, definitely from that transcriptions that I've done so far, whilst there is nowhere near as much pressure as trying to transcribe things live it does make you very aware of speech patterns and how... It's very odd, sometimes, if you look at a passage of text, it doesn't make any sense. You would never be able to paste it out of context [**CM:** Yeah] because it just doesn't make any sense.

**CM:** Yeah.

**DT:** And the amount of jumping around we do between half sentences and continuing or starting a story. It's a very interesting process to go through, it's almost... I don't know, I'm sort of considering whether it's worthwhile, just as an exercise to try and transcribe your own speech. [**CM:** Yeah.] Just to look at the patterns, not for any [particular] outcome.

**CM:** Yeah it's interesting how then, when you think about written language, how we put this grammar and these rules on top of speech that just doesn't work. And I guess that's why it's quite difficult to write dialogue and things in fiction or it's quite difficult to actually get realistic dialogue and things going... It's almost like a translation type thing between what actual speech is like and how we write.

**DT:** Definitely, I think yeah that's where... It does annoy me quite a lot in novels, if there's any lengthy amount of dialogue in there. Because if it's written too correctly, it just doesn't read as a natural conversation or even as a monologue it doesn't read that well.

**CM:** Yeah, definitely. Also, from subtitling, I know that people don't actually pause where there are commas, like people pause in the middle of sentences which is kind of annoying because I always put in a comma and it's like, "There wasn't supposed to be a comma!"

**DT:** I find... What are 'three full stops'? Is that an ellipse?

**CM:** An ellipsis.

**DT:** Yeah, an ellipsis! They're my best friend in transcribing. Because otherwise people trail off in the middle of a sentence. What else do you do with it? You can't just start [a new sentence] again.

**CM:** Yeah yeah, I know.

**DT:** Otherwise you end up with square brackets everywhere and trying to explain that something was inaudible or they just stopped. Actually, how do you... Do you have to describe emotions at all? I've found it quite difficult to... Sometimes if you write down what's been said, if you can't hear laughter, quite often it can be really appropriate.

**CM:** Yeah, sometimes you can just get that with text messages, if you're texting someone.

**DT:** Yeah, I'm terrified of texting people.

**CM:** My friend is always like, "When you're texting people, if you're texting someone that you fancy you have to put 'ha ha' all the time or they won't know you're joking".

**DT:** That's why we've got emojis now.

**CM:** In subtitling you put 'LAUGHTER' Or people can often see, you know, if you can't hear them perhaps you can see people are laughing so I guess...

**DT:** At least you've got the visuals with your work which definitely help. So, you recently moved back from Glasgow. How long were you there for?

**CM:** I was just there for a year.

**DT:** Yeah. Were you involved with reading a lot up there?

**CM:** I did a couple of readings, mainly... There's a guy I knew up there called Hugh who... His stage name is Dangle Manatee, I think I told you about him when you were...

**DT:** Oh possibly, I was thinking about or still am planning to go Glasgow [with the podcast].

**CM:** Yeah so he used to put on some poetry events and then I had a friend, Rory who lived there as well. He also put on some poetry events so I did a couple of readings there but I was only there for a year, so I didn't really make any connections apart from that.

**DT:** Do you know of the spoken word podcast up there called [Lies, Dreaming](#)? It's based in Edinburgh, so I mean there's no reason you would know them because obviously, I don't want to get shouted at for lumping Glasgow and Edinburgh in together. But they gig a lot in Glasgow as well. But it is quite a nice.... It's an audio zine, it's set up as that so you can submit audio recordings of your work.

I mainly mention it because I'd just like to give them a shout out on the programme as well, but they're definitely worth checking out if you want to know what's going on.

**CM:** Yeah, that's really interesting to submit an audio thing.

**DT:** It works really well and they lay like an instrumental backing track because quite often what lets audio recordings down is that they sound fine when you're reading in a room. But when they're completely isolated you've either got the hiss of your own microphone which maybe hasn't been edited out properly or you've just got this strange isolation of the piece which maybe doesn't suit it. But because there's a consistent backing track for it, it unifies all the pieces as well. So, if they're quite disparate pieces at least there's one unifying element. They also have themes, so one month it was Iceland...

**CM:** I think I may have heard of them but not checked them out. What are they called?

**DT:** Lies, Dreaming. But I think they might have had another podcast called Poetry as Fuck.

**CM:** Poetry as Fuck? Cool yeah.

**DT:** I can't remember their names. I was going to say Rory but that's just because they're Scottish.

**CM:** Rory's an Irish name isn't it?

**DT:** There's quite a lot in Glasgow I think as well. I know a lot of Scottish rugby players called Rory. Or I don't know them personally but I know of them from watching rugby. Okay, before we take a final reading have you got anything coming up.

**CM:** Well yeah at the end of January [2017] I'm actually going to go to Madrid and do a reading there and I'm going to make a little booklet. So, it's a bookshop there and somebody I know who's called Rob Greer and he's just moved there and he puts on readings there and he invited me. So, I'm going to go and read there and make a little booklet of like nine or ten poems. So, that's really interesting

**DT:** It's always fun to read in other countries. [**CM:** Yeah yeah.] Is there a festival happening?

**CM:** No, I think this bookshop is kind of a bit of a destination for people and that's kind of what they do there. Yeah, he lives in the bookshop, it's kind of like 'the dream'.

**DT:** It's nice to be an international poet as well. Even if it is just through your friends.

**CM:** 'International poet of mystery'! Though not very mysterious.

**DT:** Okay, thank you very much.

**CM:** Thanks, David.

**DT:** As we said at the beginning and I will have said in the introduction people can check you out online. Just see the description for the audio and we'll finish with a poem.

**CM:** Okay, so this one is called;

Bambi Realises That His Mum Has Died

It's not so much the shot that does it,  
but when you turn around and  
see that  
you might have been  
running alone  
for a long time.

and when my moth-urrrrr  
fast forwards over death she omits  
this stag  
that comes down from the mountain  
to declare  
that all moth-urrrss  
are transitory

and, just this once,  
to call me son.

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**DT:** Thank you very much Catherine.

**CM:** Thank you.

**DT:** Hopefully speak to you again soon.

**CM:** Yeah definitely. It's been great.

**DT:** Bye.

**End of transcript**