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[Episode 9: Fen Speak - \(March 2015\)](#)

Transcript edited by Harriet Foyster - 12/06/2917

Host: David Turner - **DT**

Guests: Elaine Ewart - **EE**, Poppy Kleiser - **PK**, Leanne Moden - **LM**

Conversation:

DT: Hello my name is David Turner and this is the fifth Lunar Poetry Podcast. This month I'm in Ely and I'm joined by Elaine Ewart and Leanne Moden, both former [Fenland Poet Laureates](#), and Poppy Kleiser the current Fenland Poet Laureate. And as usual my guests will begin with giving us a short introduction to themselves. Maybe we'll start with Leanne.

LM: Okay. My name's Leanne Moden. I was the Fenland Poet Laureate in 2013 and now I co-organize and run the [Fenland Poet Laureate competition](#), co-run the [Fen Speak](#) open mic nights in the Fens and just generally push poetry as much as I can.

DT: And Elaine?

EE: My name is Elaine Ewart, I was the first Fenland Poet Laureate in 2012. I am a poet and I suppose broadly speaking nature writer and I, along with Leanne, currently co-organize the Fenland Poet Laureate Awards and co-organize the monthly open mic nights Fen Speak.

DT: And Poppy?

PK: My name is Poppy Kleiser and I'm the current Fenland Poet Laureate but only for two more months, we're getting ready to judge the next competition next month, and I live in the Fens so I generally write all about the Fens and its mysteries and wildness.

DT: Yeah. So regarding the Poet Laureate title, we're going to come to that towards the end, so I think just because of the location and I think the Fens are obviously going to be a focus of the conversation today, I just wondered if we could give the listeners a brief geographical description of the area and its boundaries. Just to set the scene a little bit, people might not know what the Fenland is.

LM: Sure so the Fens is a portion of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, and a little bit of Suffolk. And it's a flat marshy area that was reclaimed from the sea. So it's got a beautiful romantic history to it. And it's sort of north of Cambridge and sort of west of Kings Lynn, and south of Spalding, so that's kind of the geography of it.

DT: South of Spalding that's a niche description.

LM: Sorry about that!

EE: It is slightly complicated!

DT: But I think actually that's the idea of giving a description as to what the Fens are because it is quite... When you try to explain to people it is just that bit... You know it's, I don't want to belittle it and say it's just that bit in the middle but strictly speaking it is the bit between everything else, isn't it?

PK: It's quite a large area.

DT: Yeah it's huge isn't it?

LM: It's an incredibly rural area and it's very, very, very flat.

PK: You definitely know as soon as you've left King's Lynn, the other side, it gets so much hillier and it's like you just know you're not in the Fens anymore.

DT: I noticed that today coming up on the train. I can't remember what point it is but it is around the Waterbeach and the soil gets much blacker straight away. Okay. So between the three of you could you give us some sort of description of what Fen poetry is? It doesn't have to be... You don't have to agree on something, if there are three descriptions that's fine. But just some idea of what you believe that Fen poetry is.

EE: Well I think it's really a very broad thing. It's really, I think, poetry that is so strongly associated with the place that you're in and your relationship to the land and to its history and its people. I don't think we should be really prescriptive about what it is.

LM: Definitely, I think with the Fen Speak open mic nights what we're trying to do is encourage people who live in the fens to engage in poetry in whichever way they wish to. So whether that's sort of spoken word performance stuff about, I don't know, biscuits or anything like that, or things that are very tightly tied into the land and the landscape. Anything goes really it's just helping people in an area that doesn't have a lot of arts funding and doesn't have a lot of facilities for the arts to engage with poetry I think.

PK: I mean I've always written around the landscape, anyway, so I've been very close to that and when I came to Fenland I thought it was different to what I was used to living in the city. It was desolate and kind of isolated and eerie, in a way. But that is inspirational and it definitely was to me. But then when you find a hub of people that are doing the same things as you it's really nice to be able to find that in such a desolate place and engage with people, so that was really nice.

DT: Yeah I mean I suppose a follow up question to that would be if... I understand the point about maybe trying to encourage people in this area to just engage with poetry regardless, but do you feel there's anything happening here regarding poetry that is different to around the country? Because all three of you travel a fair bit to do readings elsewhere don't you? Would you say there's any difference in writing style or is it just linked to the landscape do you think?

PK: That's hard. I don't know.

EE: People have very different approaches. There are people who are sort of strongly influenced by sort of folk traditions and with writing about landscape, but there are others who just write poems about just everyday things. So it's difficult to say whether there is a distinctive poetry coming from this area.

PK: There's probably less of a style. I mean in London you get quite influenced by things I imagine because it's so... It's surrounding you, isn't it?

DT: Well I was just about to make that point actually that it's not so much that... When I say is there a particular Fen style I didn't mean to root it too heavily in tradition. That wasn't

the point. I just mean there could be a particular take on, you know, you could be writing the modern world still but still be influenced can't you by tradition?

LM: I think there's more of an influence of page poetry out here as opposed to in a city where there's a lot of spoken word and things like that. We tend to have a lot of people who are looking at formal types of poems.

DT: Do you think that could also come from, you know, perhaps in the Fens you're still afforded more time to sit down and read things whereas maybe in cities... And I don't mean it's just a typically Fen thing, maybe it's just a rural thing but in the city maybe you don't necessarily have time to sit down or it's harder to find time to sit down with books.

PK: People have always come here for peace and seclusion, that's why there are so many churches around here. All the clergy would come over here and have isolation. So yeah maybe it is just more of a peaceful place.

LM: And I have certainly noticed that within our particular group there is a huge variety of styles and approaches to poetry. Whereas perhaps if you go to a city and go to a slam or something like that there seems to be more of a style to it.

EE: Yes there's no dominant culture in performance.

PK: That's exactly it yeah.

EE: And I think we're sort of involved in both the page poetry and the performance poetry side of things and I think that's a really valuable sort of synergy because the Fenland Poet Laureate Awards are judged on the page as opposed to some local Laureates which are judged in performance. But also part of what the Fenland Poet Laureate Awards do is encourage events and live poetry as well. So I think these things feed off each other for me.

DT: Yeah. So only one of you today is actually from the Fens which is Leanne. Originally from Wisbech, is that correct?

LM: I'm from Wisbech, yeah, for my sins.

DT: Which I know quite well because I lived for three years in Wisbech, I did my carpentry apprenticeship there. So hello to everyone at Castle Joinery. They're not going to be listening. So Poppy and Elaine are not from the Fens. Where are you from?

PK: I'm from Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, so not too far.

DT: And Elaine?

EE: I'm from near Lincoln, originally.

DT: Near Lincoln originally. So not that far.

EE: Not very far actually!

PK: But it is the North.

[Laughter.]

EE: Well let's not get into that controversy.

DT: But since, maybe this question is a bit more focused toward Poppy and Elaine the moment, but how have the Fens influenced, if at all, your writing styles since you've been here?

PK: Well they've definitely influenced mine a lot. I've always been into history and folk traditions of writing. But it was hard for me when I came here because, as I say, I moved from a city in Cambridge and I felt it was very weird. The people are kind of traditional in a lot of ways, there's not much culture going on, not much funding for that. So I definitely felt isolated.

But the more I read about and the more I heard about the Fens, the more I came to love it because it's such a rebellious place. I mean it's wild in its cultivation, its history of land rights and protests are really strong even though we're never taught about it in school. And the stories that you hear, the witch stories, it's so evocative, it's just so inspiring.

EE: I guess what particularly has sort of grown on me as I've lived here is how the... The kind of hiddenness of the landscape, the fact that it's got secrets, you could knock out across the Fens and it's as if it's concealing its stories and you have to go and get them. Yes it's hard to say precisely how that's affected my writing but I suppose that's part of what I'm trying to do, it's to uncover those stories and those moments.

DT: That's interesting actually, this idea of uncovering. I'm just going to refer back to [November's podcast](#) when I was interviewing [Helen Mort](#) in Sheffield, and she was talking of inspiration coming as being haunted by an idea for a poem. And just some of the ways that you've described the landscape so far, you know and it's often described as haunting around here, especially at night and in the winter with the fog, do you think that the Fens perhaps lends itself more to poetry in that it's sort of a throwback to how all of rural Britain was at a time before. But the Fens still retains that romanticism.

PK: Yeah, yeah I think so.

LM: Definitely.

DT: So do you find it quite easy to find inspiration here in an area that most people would consider quite bleak?

PK: Yeah I mean it's the bleakness that is sort of inspirational I suppose.

DT: Actually I think it's going to be a good time to go on to our first poem which will be Poppy's poem. What's it called?

PK: It's called The Optimist. And this was inspired by the land rights of the Fens, and basically the Fen Tigers and the fight that they put up to stop the Fens being drained, to keep their livelihoods and the effect that this has had on British culture in general, and it's The Optimist.

[The author has not approved this poem for transcription.]

[00:15:07]

DT: Thank you very much. Actually, just on that last question I was meaning to ask just a follow up question to Elaine and Poppy each. Do you think the effects that the Fens have had on your writing, do you think they will remain with you should you move to any other part of the country? Do you think it's had an indelible... Left an indelible mark?

PK: I think so. It definitely makes you think deeper about a culture than the way things appear, and the relationship that people have with the landscape over time and how that changes the modern culture I suppose in a society.

DT: Right, next question. So I lived in Fenland myself, I went to secondary school in Chatteris, more than fifteen years ago! But I have a lasting memory of it, like a really strong storytelling tradition in that area around the villages. And while this is probably common in a lot of rural communities, I mean it is very strong around here I think. Do you, as poets or writers, feel an obligation to document these stories in your poems. Do you feel like you should be retelling these in a way? Poppy?

PK: Yeah. I mean I think poetry is very much of the people. And I think it should be, I don't think it should be something that is exclusive. And I suppose that's what we try and do as poets is to capture the essence of a place by telling these stories, these stories of the people.

EE: Yes and I think there is as you say a strong oral tradition of storytelling. And I think I find really that the stories come and find you, that you suddenly happen upon really fascinating histories of people associated with the places. And you can't really help but write about them.

LM: Yeah. I think Elaine's right. I think it's not so much... It doesn't feel so much of an obligation as something that comes and grabs you with both hands and you feel you need to write it.

DT: Yeah. And that's what I was trying to get to the bottom of, is whether you feel like it's just something that you want to do or whether you feel like you should have to do it. The next question was going to be towards the idea of, or this concept of, truth in these stories. As stories develop anyway, besides... If we just ignore the idea of what truth is anyway because we'll be here for about two weeks! But do you have any issue with being

true to the story is what I mean? Or do you feel like it's fair game to sort of just elaborate on top of...

EE: I think it is a natural thing for stories to change and develop as they're re-told. And it's interesting because during... When you have a year as Fenland Poet Laureate people ask you to write poems for things and sometimes this is associated with an anniversary... There was the Charles Dickens anniversary, and also [Octavia Hill](#) the social reformer, and in writing the poems I'm often thinking "I'm not sure whether the recipient is going to actually agree that this was their message." But I think that's okay and we all look at and get different things out of what appear to be the same facts, and I think that's how it works.

DT: It is actually the point I was trying to get to is this idea that when you take a title as Poet Laureate, or even if you are working as building a reputation as a poet and somebody commissions you to write upon a certain subject, you know it is possible that there would be an unreasonable expectation on you to write as a historian rather than as poet, is what I mean. So then how do you deal with that issue of wanting to be true to the poem?

EE: I think you respect what your subject is. And I think it has to be... The person listening to or reading it I think also has to respect this is your take on it.

PK: It's all a question of perspective isn't it?

EE: It is yes.

PK: I think if you didn't feel something about that subject you wouldn't write it. Or you couldn't write it, I suppose. And you can always say no to things, I felt like.

EE: Yes it's a very difficult thing, the idea of writing to order and inspiration... Balancing that.

PK: Yeah and sometimes it can really work can't it? And you feel like "Yes that's really good. I can do that."

DT: I was going to leave this question until later on but since we're talking about it anyway, instead of re-visiting it, all three of you, as Fenland Poet Laureates, are you expected to write poems for people? What are your expectations?

LM: So basically it's very much an open-ended a position. So you are not obliged to do anything necessarily, but you can speak to local organizations and write poems for them or write poems for events. And we have ties with the museum in Wisbech and [ADeC](#), the arts organization here in Ely. So there are lots of opportunities available that come with the title in order to go to events, write poems for people, be commissioned for things. And equally because there's no specific remit you can say no if you want to and that's what makes it quite a nice, flexible thing.

EE: Yes there are opportunities but not particular obligations.

DT: Yes yes. Okay. Leanne and Elaine as you mentioned in your introductions you co-founded Fen Speak which is a monthly open mic poetry night. Is it Fenland's only open mic?

LM: It's the only regular one so far as we know. Yeah.

DT: And it alternates between venues in Ely and Wisbech?

LM: That's right.

DT: And there are some special ones. I attended one in King's Lynn just before Christmas which was really good.

LM: On Tour!

EE: Yes Fen Speak on Tour.

DT: And Poppy is a regular attendee. Could you explain first why you started the night?

LM: Okay. So it was actually my idea, for my sins again. So basically there are a lot of poetry open mic nights and slams and things in Cambridge and in Peterborough, but the rest of Cambridgeshire, West Norfolk, don't have anything like that and I felt like there was a need there and a niche that needed to be filled. So I roped Elaine in and we started Fen Speak and we've got over 150 people on our Facebook page and over 60 people on our mailing list and we regularly have about 30 to 40 people come to our nights.

DT: Yeah it was really well attended in King's Lynn.

LM: Yes so there's definitely a need there and we feel like we've sort of been going from strength to strength really.

EE: Yes it's been really... We've been quite bowled over by how enthusiastic people have been about it, wanting to come, no shortage of people to perform.

PK: And people have travelled haven't they? From Norwich, Cambridge, Peterborough.

EE: They've travelled, yes.

DT: And from the outset was it important to you that you travel from one side of the Fens to the other?

LM: Yes definitely.

EE: Yes because Fenland, particularly the Wisbech end, doesn't have so much going on from a literary performance point of view. It was important to us that we kept both Ely and Wisbech linked together.

LM: Our main model is inclusivity and there are a lot of people in Wisbech, because it's quite an isolated place, who aren't necessarily able to travel to Peterborough or to Cambridge or even to Ely. So we needed to be there, or to have a base in each place, in order to sort of catch all the poets and writers and storytellers who wanted to be involved.

EE: I do feel it's now become a real network where people are making links all over the area and that's really nice.

DT: And when did you start it?

LM: September 2013, so we've not been going for a huge amount of time.

DT: Has it been growing as an event?

LM: Yes it has yeah.

DT: That's good. Do you think you're going to stick with that format as it is? I'm really interested in that Fen Speak on Tour idea, I think that's really nice.

LM: Well we've got meetings with the Arts Council coming up so hopefully we're going to look into funding and the possibility of expanding.

EE: Yes, having maybe workshops, particularly for young people, and other events. I think probably the idea of keeping the basic model as it is but we may have additional ones with a slightly different focus.

DT: Actually just because you mentioned it, and it wasn't actually going to be a question, but it's something I've been thinking about a lot. I run, with Lizzy Palmer, the Silence Found a Tongue night which is the launch night for [Lunar Poetry](#), but we've been talking about hopefully during a half time or something we'll take a day off work and run a children's open mic, or a young peoples' open mic. Just because you mentioned it there Elaine how important do you think that it is that there should be more events like that?

EE: Well I think it's vital really and it takes a lot. I think particularly young people need to have the opportunity to experience live poetry as something that's fun to do and not something that's obscure and difficult or not for them. And if you don't get that when you're younger then yes the future of poetry is in trouble!

LM: Yeah and I think the issue particularly around the rural areas around Fenland is not necessarily that there is poverty itself but there's poverty of opportunity, and that's something that we really need to sort out.

DT: And I do think it's... It annoys me a bit that poets that run nights as a private affair that aren't linked to funded programs by councils don't take it upon themselves to offer more opportunities like this to young people because effectively what happens if the council puts on something or the local... do the LEA still exist? I don't know! Anyway the equivalent of whatever that is now. You know, Local Education Authority Boards. If they are putting on

events the poets they're going to choose are going to be very safe, they're going to be syllabus based. Whereas I think if poets started putting on... If you had a young person's open mic day or night, linked to a night that was already running and you got people down and you just told them "alright no swearing" it's pretty easy to do!

LM: Absolutely.

DT: You know you're speaking to young people, you give young people an opportunity to step up and speak in between.

EE: And I think children can tell when something is being put on in order to improve them rather than you know...

PK: Creative expression?

EE: Exactly.

DT: Did any of you three have opportunities like that when you were younger? I don't know how long you've been writing or reading.

LM: No. See I've not been writing for very long. I've only been writing since about 2008, so sort of into adulthood was my writing. So at school I remember poetry being "here is the anthology with the safe poets in" and you just learn the bits that are interesting and tick it off the list.

PK: I mean I started as an actress and I've been writing and acting sort of since I was a child. So I used to have to learn a lot of poetry. And so I always enjoyed it in that way but I don't think it was accessible. It's only because I sought it out.

EE: I certainly can't remember there being performance opportunities.

PK: No, definitely not.

EE: I think it's something that needs... you know if you're to be encouraged to do that it takes a lot of confidence building. I mean I've been surprised by how very accomplished poets are very nervous about stepping up to the mic, there have been published poets at our nights who have never read their work at an event which has astonished me! But I'm really, really proud that they felt that it was a good environment to actually start doing that.

PK: In some ways you feel like in order to get anywhere you have to be able to read well.

LM: It seems to be the case nowadays I think with literary festivals being what they are you do need to sort of have that edge to you, yeah I think so.

DT: Are we going to talk about that? Because that's a long discussion!

[Laughter.]

DT: Maybe we should leave that. I think generally what you said is not a problem, just analysing it is quite difficult! So rather than that maybe we'll have a second poem from Elaine?

EE: This poem actually is not set in Fenland. It's set in Cornwall but I'm reminded of what Poppy said earlier about clergymen going to remote places because this is a case in point. This poem was based on the life of [Robert Stephen Hawker](#), a 19th century clergyman who had a reputation for being very eccentric. So he was in this remote parish in Cornwall where he had permission to be as strange as he pleased. And one of the things that he did which spoke quite powerfully to me, he lived near the cliffs, a place that was very very dangerous for ships. And when there were shipwrecks he would go and make sure that the dead from the wrecks were given a Christian burial in his churchyard. So this is

Harvest at Morwenstowe

All must be safely gathered in. As the villagers
Push shut their buffeted doors, their vicar,
Flapping, motley in primrose and purple, zig-zags

Down the cliff path, lurid in the leering,
False light that jags between the roiling
Slate-clouds and the slant-edged rocks.

At this outpost of the eternal, no-one
Is given up for lost. The sky clears; the bell
Is rung on the hill top; and the gleanings

Of the storm, the mortal flotsam, cradled
And folded, is sown in the fresh furrow
Beside the church. 'For the earth,'

He reads, 'bringeth forth fruit of herself.'
At dusk, he is seen through the vicarage
Window, writing letters of condolence,

By the blackbird, who cocks her tail
In the hedge, splashing the undergrowth
A warm maroon; and tears through the brambles.

©Elaine Ewart

DT: Thank you very much. So sticking with the open mic theme how important are open mic nights in the development of you own poetry?

LM: Well for me they were really important because I was writing for a little while before I ever showed my poetry to anyone and I was actually trapped into going to an open mic by

a friend of mine who signed me up without my knowledge. They were like "go ahead, that'll be fine!" So that was a bit of a traumatic way in to it. But it was actually a really wonderful night in Norwich actually, and from that I realized that it was kind of something that I really loved doing so yeah, it came out of that and sort of since going to open mics you find people who ask you to do featured performances and you know opportunities arise from these networks of people at open mics so I think they're really important in that way.

EE: Well I was suddenly thrown into the poetry community by winning the Fenland Poet Laureate award because I hadn't had anything published before then and I certainly never read any of it. And so the next week I was then at festivals and so on doing readings. For me I find it's a great way of meeting like-minded people who are interested in poetry and getting that sort of creative energy and also getting immediate reactions to things that you've written because it can be quite an isolated life just sitting writing poems and then sending them off and then months later getting replies. There is something particular and very immediate about doing live events as a performer which is really valuable even if I wouldn't really call myself primarily someone who performs.

PK: Yeah I think, like what you were saying about it being quite isolated, especially if you discuss it with people that are your friends or relatives that aren't poets and sometimes you get funny feedback, when they don't actually know what they're talking about. And then it's quite a relief sometimes to talk to actual poets who say what you can improve or what is good. But it is strange, it took me quite a long time to unite performance and poetry.

Because of acting I found it completely different performing my own work that I'd written, I found it just completely terrifying. It took a lot of work to actually work the two together but it's great. And especially nights like Fen Speak where people are really supportive. I've been to other nights where it's kind of cliquey and you don't get the same vibe but with Fen Speak everyone's really welcoming to each other and supportive so it's great.

DT: Yes. So I get the impression that all three of you mainly enjoy the open mic scene for the connection you get with audiences and other poets, and there's a level of feedback you wouldn't necessarily get.

PK: Definitely.

DT: So rather than, for instance, you don't... You wouldn't necessarily use it for developing a particular poem, would you use it for changing the writing of a poem?

LM: I have done that in the past definitely. You perform something and, because I try very hard to be funny in my poetry.

PK: And you are funny!

LM: Well bless you. But sometimes you'll write a joke and you'll think "this is a brilliant joke I'll put this in my poem" and then nothing. No reaction. So it's nice to have that feedback to then think "well maybe this is not as great as I thought it was." Or you know vice versa, something that you thought that you've read just because you think that you

need some space to fill and people go "oh I really enjoyed that poem" and you don't necessarily think that it would have been an enjoyable poem. So it's really interesting to get that feedback from other people definitely.

DT: And this idea with Fen Speak, which I definitely saw myself and I agree that it's a very open, supportive, warm environment, but do you not feel... And I'm not suggesting for things to go cliquey because that is just rubbish in itself, but do you think there comes a time when you are comfortable with reading in front of people that you need a more critical audience in order to...

PK: I do, yeah. I think it would be nice to sort of do writing groups as well, to actually sit down and look at your work and look at some other people's work and analyse it as well. But that's a different thing I mean open mics are fun.

DT: That's what I mean, I've been thinking about it a lot. I wrote something recently for Lunar Poetry and it's just this idea whether there is a need for a division where you still have... And actually a follow up question, do you see the performance scene merely as a place for straight recitals of poetry or would you like to see it being more experimental? I mean of course it can be a combination of the two things but should you then move into the realm of things being a bit more experimental then you're asking a bit more the audience aren't you?

EE: I think as Poppy says that different events and environments serve different purposes. So I think yes there should be room for experiment and yes you shouldn't be so worried about getting something wrong that you don't take risks. But you also need on the other side of things somebody who will be able to give a knowledgeable idea of whether that did work.

DT: I think that the comparison I'd probably make, and I hope this doesn't sound rude because it's not the intention, but I would compare Fen Speak to [Poetry Unplugged](#) in London in that you're, and I think this is a very nice thing that happens, but you're almost more applauded for standing up and reading, rather than whether it's any good or not it's actually getting up and doing the thing that's being applauded. And whether then there should be another stage, I don't know if you could combine the two elements because perhaps you need a stage where it's welcoming which you already have, but then another space to go, only for the people that want to be critiqued.

EE: Well I think that's it. You've got a mixture of people who go to Fen Speak and who are there for different reasons. Some of them are practicing poets trying out new material or just turning up at a new night to meet other people, there are some who really are there for the social occasion and it's something they wrote a while ago and I don't think... I think certainly developing an event that is going down a more experimental route would be very valuable. But I think in a sense the Fenland Poet Laureate awards links in with Fen Speak in that that is a competition, it's something that people are aiming to win and so it has a quality element to it and the person who wins it then has the chance to develop their skills by being involved in other events.

DT: Yeah sure. Actually the next question was going to be about the application process for the Poet Laureate, but before we do that I think we'll take our third poem from Leanne.

LM: Okay. So this is a cover poem, if you will. I was a bit upset that that rockstars and musicians could cover other people's songs but poets couldn't necessarily do that. So I have had a go and this is called

Kubla Khan's Bar and Grill

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately bar and grill decree:
Where rum, the sacred spirit, ran
In cocktails measureless to man
For it was buy one get one free.
Twice five miles of dancing floor
With burly bouncers on the door:
And here were girls with luminous tans,
Where blossomed many a streaky flank;
And here, disgorged from minivans,
Stag dos – the men the size of tanks.

But oh! that well stocked bar which slanted
Down the dark club, slick with sweat!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er a KFC was haunted
By men who'd not found Nando's yet.
And from this nightclub, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
With shouts and groans and loud dramatic heaving,
A mighty vomit stream was forced –
He'd battled shots and come off worse.
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail:
He was kicked out then, wan and pale.
The sheer amount left us impressed.
(A barman came to clean the mess.)
Five miles we walked with a mazy motion:
How long the queue for drinks now ran!
The queue for drinks measureless to man,
The guy in front requests an ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Deep drunken voices threatening war!

For Dave had spilt the pint of Darren
And Kate had pilfered all his straights.
So now his baccy tin was barren
And his confusion turned to hate.
A miracle of rare device,
To order ale that's served with ice!

The moron in the DJ booth
In the corner, and in truth
He mixed bizarre the beats he laid
And on his sub-woofer he played
Such songs as drove us to the roof.

And smoked we there twixt bins and sea gulls
Our shoes stuck fast in unknown brine.
We watched flesh push through ruptured hulls
Of frocks now stained with tears and wine.
And look! the local letch is here!
His arms are like an octopus!
And look! he's had six pints beer,
The girls all cry, Beware! Beware!
His wandering hands, his creepy stare!
Weave a circle round him too,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he hath on Sambucca fed,
And drunk the milk of Malibu.

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DT: [Laughter.] Thank you very much. I like that. So now I'd like to talk about the application process involved with being selected as Fenland Poet Laureate. And for the benefit of listeners the criteria are: that you must live, work or study in Fenland and applicants must submit a Fenland related poem of no more than forty lines typed on to one side of A4 paper. Now this podcast will be going out too late for the 2015 application, but you can find out more information about the whole process and next year's application and who indeed wins this year on the website which is...?

LM: It's atelier-east.co.uk.

DT: And we'll put that on the blog and on Facebook and Twitter. What I'm wondering is with the application process, do you think... Could it be considered too restrictive or too blinkered in that it's a very, very small selection or a very small example of one person's work? Just based on reading those criteria that's all.

EE: One thing that I think every year is "a poem about Fenland. Are there new things to say about Fenland?" But it always turns out that there are. Yes I think it is inevitably. But I think partly the idea is that it's open to everybody. So even people who've not got a body of work, if they happen to write a great poem then they have that opportunity. And also practical considerations, we're on a shoestring budget, the people who are running it are not paid and so we have to have something that's doable with the time element.

LM: We can't do a reading of pamphlets.

EE: Yes. And of course it's free to enter which is part of the inclusiveness.

DT: My question wasn't supposed to be accusatory, it's supposed to give you a chance...

EE: No no no, I'm sorry!

DT: No no I wasn't reading anything into your tone then, I just meant it's good sometimes to have a chance to explain yourselves, because people assume sometimes that you have an office and there are ten or fifteen of you reading.

EE: It sounds like that yes.

LM: It is just me and Elaine!

DT: And also I think it's good to explain that you know the whole thing has only been running for three years. So the three Fenland Poet Laureates are sitting in this room now.

EE: There are plenty of things that we could do to develop it but I think also just keeping it going each year, because once you've got the Fenland Poet Laureate they go and do their thing.

LM: We're expanding.

DT: I think the reason I've brought this up is because regardless of whether people know what it is to be Fenland Poet Laureate, people sort of have an idea of what the title Poet Laureate means, and would probably assume it's got a long tradition anyway because of the title. So do you feel that you... And of course I don't mean for you to have to commit to anything now, but do you see the application process as changing over time or are you happy with the way it continues to run?

LM: We're certainly open to changing if that's possible and I mean if there's if there's room both practically...

EE: Yes I think that's something that we'll be discussing with potential funders to try to develop it really. I think this is the starting point. And I think one of the things we need to do as I said earlier is also develop the... Because as well as the adult Fenland Poet Laureate there's also a young Fenland Poet Laureate, and that's something that really does need to be developed.

LM: And we are hoping to be able to... I believe was it the first year when it was with another arts organizations for the first year? And I believe that they went into schools is that right?

EE: I'm not sure that they did but I think the more funding you have the more things you're then able to do, so you can have workshops that go into schools and build those relationships to enable it to develop.

DT: And what impact on your poetry careers has there been since being...?

PK: Well loads! People definitely take it seriously, the title, and just all of a sudden you just get invited to places and get paid for things sometimes yeah. And it's really great and it gives you the confidence to be able to think "actually I can do this professionally" if that's ever possible for anyone.

DT: I might start calling myself the Podcast Laureate.

PK: It's a great feeling to say it as well!

LM: The thing is it's not the title itself that does it, a lot of it is the hard work that you put in behind it as well. You have to network but the title really does help.

DT: I'm not interested then.

[Laughter.]

LM: I mean I've been invited to do things at the Royal Albert Hall and [Bestival](#) and I feel like it's all off the back of you know having that title and having had that year and those opportunities to sort of push forward.

EE: I mean it's a combination between sort of having the network set up and you doing your work to, even though I know it sounds terrible, but network and make contact and put yourself out there. But I think having that title gave me enough to say "I'm the Poet Laureate." It gives you the confidence to say "yes I can come into your school and talk about whatever."

LM: Definitely.

PK: And it is for people that do want to be poets. So we do have that thing of pushing ourselves forward anyway in our careers I suppose, because we all want to do it.

DT: Hard work and all that! So we're just going to move on to the two final questions which are the same as always. And we'll go round once with the first one and then again with the second. If you could give us some influences over your writing and performing, and they don't necessarily have to be poets.

LM: Oh gosh so I'm more at the performance end, so people like [Kate Tempest](#), [Hollie McNish](#), [John Cooper Clarke](#), [Benjamin Zephaniah](#), those people are more my influence than perhaps the traditional poets.

DT: Sure. And Elaine?

EE: Well one particular poet who has been a great influence on me is the Scottish poet [Kathleen Jamie](#). I think she hates being called a nature poet but she has written a lot about relationships with the environment and the work of attention in just seeing beyond the surface.

PK: I've always been influenced by the romantic poets, Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats. But I love the sound of words as well, so [Dylan Thomas](#), people like that, and Yates as well have really influenced me. And I love the way Dylan Thomas talks about place, with such... I can't even think of the word. It's a pleasure to listen to even if you don't understand it.

DT: It's nice when people say proper poets names on here, it doesn't happen often. Not that your answers were... It just doesn't happen very often. And then we'll probably go back the other way again, and for the benefit of the listeners I'm pointing around the room. Is there anything that you would recommend to our listeners to see or watch or go listen to, anything?

PK: There are definitely a lot of brilliant poets at the moment, Helen Mort who did your last podcast I'm a big fan of hers, I got her book for Christmas. I think she's brilliant. [Sally Jenkinson](#) as well. But there are also a lot of great shows like poets are now creating shows out of their own work, adding an extra thing to it and yeah they're brilliant things to see.

EE: Well. Various things. Something I've been really looking at at the moment is [Anne Carson](#)'s translation of [Sappho, If Not Winter](#), which I'm just fascinated by the idea of fragments and the way that when Sappho originally wrote the poem it's now a completely different poem to the one that we're now reading it its fragmented form.

LM: So the West Midlands poet [Liz Berry](#) I think is very, very good at the moment so definitely go to see her or read her work if you can.

DT: Boom. Right. So that's the end. That's Lunar Poetry Podcast number five. I'll just thank once more Poppy Kleiser, Elaine Ewart and Leanne Moden, and links to their Twitter pages, any blogs, any interesting websites will be up on the [Lunar Poetry blog](#).

End of transcript.