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[Episode 20: Martin Pettitt \(April 2015\)](#)

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Martin Pettitt – **MP**

Transcript edited by [Martin Pettitt](#) – 07/03/2017

Conversation

DT: My name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts and tonight I am in [i'klectic gallery](#) in Waterloo, and I'm at Silence Found a Tongue. That's a group of people. In an audience. Yeah. Tonight is bought to you in front of a live studio audience. It's almost as good as having friends. And tonight I'm joined by Martin Pettitt. Pettitt is spelt with 4 T's, a P, an E and an I. Hello Martin.

MP: Hiya, all T's intact.

DT: All T's intact.

MP: I might drop a few during the night but...

DT: Fucking Brilliant. Poem please.

MP: Okay. I debated whether to read this one. This was the first one I ever read so I'm going to read it, I'm going to read it exactly as I did the first time. So, has anyone here - apart from David Turner - ever had a fist fight with the small Asian girl?

[Audience member: Yes, my sister]

MP: Really? What happened?

DT: But she's not here, it doesn't count.

MP: Yeah it doesn't count Sorry, cross it off.

DT: [INAUDIBLE] sister is off the list.

MP:

Tender Fists

The other night
I had a fight
With a small Asian girl
She is my friend

We were at another friend's house
After the work's Christmas party
The dogma of rum was running
Through my system with a cult like determination
The mad prophet Captain Morgan at the helm
Driving me head first into the abyss
Where pain and joy whispered with one voice

The official party had come to a halt at 11:30
The oppression of the corporate hierarchy
Was dispensed with as vapid balding managers
And vacuous babbling drone colleagues
Were left in the wake of the lively few

We flew to Putney, weaving through the lights of the city
Fueled by the mere ecstasy of Dionysus

Suspended by each other's garbled, but infinite wisdom
I put on someone's hat, people said I looked good
They were wrong, I saw the pictures

We stumbled down pathways,
Looked up at many eyed buildings
Down at foreign feet, and scuffed pavements
Until a door opened
And in we fell

When we got into the flat
I remember thinking it was good to be inside
We drank more and laughed
Some smoked, some shouted
There was music playing
A lot of it I can't remember
Someone kicked over a drink

The night dissolved
Fizzing and bubbling
Smudging
Sound undulated beneath
The swaying hum of our heads

About 3am, filled with a hollow need for destruction,
I singled out my Asian friend
And said to her, "hit me"
I knew only she would do it
She had a glint in her eye
And a clench in her fist

She forcefully thumped my left arm
Purposefully and aggressively
Then it began
Others present later referred to events
As the "brawl"

Fists flew, we didn't hold back
And that was our genius
True friendship
Our hands passed through
Tenderness and came out the other side of love

Our knuckles bounced off each other
Leaving a satisfying dent on the night
And a cavity in the restraint of the audience
Between us wasn't a disparity between size

And strength
But a radical loss of self
A beyond, we both experienced as one being

Bang, bang, the fists came down
We tangled
Twisted
Cavorted
She hit me hard in the face
I went down
She fell on top of me
I clamped my legs around her

We both lay, looking into each other's eyes
An unbearable intensity
Buzzing in the hollowness of our addled heads
"I love you"
"I love you"
I stroked her face
We talked of our potential
The thrill of total release
The fear
The ecstasy of violence
The danger
The want to melt into oblivion

Then we got up
And went to talk
To other people
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DT: Thank you Martin. I never know when poems have finished but I should just take 25 people around to clap. Every podcast I do I need...

MP: That's probably what it is.

DT: ...a room full of clapping people.

MP: You just need a room full of clapping people.

DT: I should always have a room full of clapping people.

MP: I think it suits you.

DT: Why poetry Martin?

MP: *Kurwa jebana. Przepraszam.* Do you know what? I kind of see poetry in two different... Poetry, when you say that, I kind of resist it, in a way, I see trite, overindulgent, over-metaphorical stuff. I also see my friends from when I was a youth, quite yobby friends. They'd call me a twat. "You twat, what you doing poetry for?", and that's what I resist. I don't know, sort of... over...

DT: You resist being called a twat?

MP: I resist being called a twat. Although, well, I like it a bit but... I guess poetry for me is not the... not the words necessarily, not standing up and reading from a piece of paper in front of a roomful of people but everyday stuff that slips through your comprehension. Like for instance, the other day, I work in a bookshop and... this lady came in, sort of an elderly lady and she had a hunched posture and, sort of, I don't know, something emanated from her...

DT: Poet is acting out hunched posture.

MP: I don't have to act that out, I live that every day. I don't know, there was something just about [her] that slipped into my unconscious. And there was a sweetness there and an innocence and I couldn't quite comprehend it. And she came up to the till and she was like... She dropped her money, and she was like: "butter-fingers". And I thought about that for about... four days after that. And for me that's poetry almost, not...

DT: Ridiculing old ladies?

MP: I didn't ridicule her, I mean, I wasn't ridiculing her. I was thinking of her in a... Those things in poetry, like the spontaneous, passionate everyday things that happen, they're the poetry. And actually as a poet I think, in a way, it's almost a heroic failure. Like, you have to attempt to render that into words somehow and replicate those feelings to a roomful of people or on the page. I think it's never going to... it's never going to work. It's almost like you have to know it's not going to work and you do it anyway. I think that's the poetry.

DT: I was talking to someone earlier and [they said] the first line of a new poem is the first step on the route to failure.

MP: Yeah, yeah, I agree with that. I think it should be a heroic failure, not in the sense of "Epic Failure", but like a failure that is heroic. I don't want like "hashtag heroic failure". I don't want that.

DT: As a series of [INAUDIBLE].

MP: A failure that is heroic.

DT: I see what you are saying.

MP: You go too far but not far enough.

DT: It's important to use your words proper.

MP: Proper words is proper good.

DT: How often do you read in public?

MP: Well, I don't know, it depends. I come here to Silence Found a [Tongue] every night, every month, sorry.

DT: The mike can't pick that up, don't worry.

MP: The lights were turning on and off. Almost like a disco.

DT: Poet doesn't understand electricity.

MP: I don't know, I read at least once a month. For me, actually, performing is not a natural thing for me to do, almost I feel like I've survived every time I leave the stage. I don't really like being looked at despite the present situation of amplification and lighting.

DT: And have you had anything published?

MP: Yes.

DT: Such as?

MP: I did... Are we going to have a fight yet?

DT: Not yet, we will get the third poem out of the way first.

MP: Okay. What about the second one? Yeah, I had... I've been published but not through my own trying. I did a collaboration, which is quite interesting, of the [six different themes of art](#), which actually will be one of my next poems. And it was... I quite like the idea of collaborating with illustration and words, I really like this idea. And so this is... I had this published in a magazine.

DT: It always amazes me that there's not more of that happening. Maybe a second poem?

MP: OK. This is a poem based on the piece of art called [Chatterton](#) by Henry Wallace, if you know it. It is from the aforementioned piece that I did with the illustration and it's short.

Death: Chatterton, Henry Wallis, Tate

Lying along the ruffled trunk of sleep and
Wrapped in the pallid swaddling of serenity-skin;
His hands, a limpid grope, will never again hold the guile

To steal those words from the gods. He is now forever
Watched by a slumber so deep, only the supple tenderness
Of time can re-stitch his tragic existence with the material
Of flame-red that slowly dissolves from his death bed.

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DT: How do you go about critiquing your own work? Do you share it with people or...

MP: I used to. I don't really anymore. I find my process is, I don't know, it's very much finding my own, if I'm happy with it. So I redraft and redraft and redraft and redraft until I know, you just feel that the words are correct. In terms of the audience, for instance, I think actually performing and... so that one, that poem [Death: Chatterton], was a poem written for the page.

DT: Yeah.

MP: Whereas writing to perform is very very different... and just going to different events and reading different poems, I find that you can't really judge it. You don't really get to decide what works and what doesn't work. One thing's funny in one place and then you say it as if it should be funny in another place and you get nothing. So you don't really get to decide what works. You're sort of...

DT: Yeah, yeah, I mean, we don't have enough time to go into the question of whether writing stuff and reading it out from pages is different. But why did you stop sharing your work with other people. Why did that change?

MP: I don't really know. I don't know. I just changed. It just changed. I didn't feel like I needed to...

DT: Did they stop answering your calls?

MP: Kind of, it was more complicated than that.

DT: Is there any way you'd like to see your writing progress.

MP: I want to see my writing progress... I'm really interested in doing collaborations, I think. I love the idea.

DT: With other writers?

MP: With other writers or other illustrators or anything really like that, you know, almost like I want to get someone artistically pregnant. Does that make sense? You know, it's like having a baby, if you collaborate with someone, you have something that is this sort of part of you and part of them in one thing. If anyone is interested in getting artistically, creatively pregnant then... [INAUDIBLE]. Obviously impressive.

DT: Can we have another poem to change the mood please?

MP: Okay this is kind of a love poem. About when I was in bed with the young lady. Not like that you dirty bastards. It's far more romantic and existential.

Imperfection in the ECW-J

I've been here before
In beds like these,
Where there is a freshness of
Unwritten obscenities,
And the mission of a thousand
Words to defy the inevitable future,
Seems to be possible.

And of course, I was drunk
I always am.

And I was caught in the rictus
Of clumsily dawbing upon you [our blank page] –
With all the illusion of
Your infinite recognition and
Approval –

I spoke in
Splurging words about
Imperfection and love
And the raging imperative
Within me to create a synthesis
Of the two...

It went a bit like this:

“We spend our lives hiding the very thing that bought it into existence, the imperfection, the excess, the imbalance on the plain of consistency, we are the mistake. I want to love the imperfect because love is the imperfect itself, love is taking responsibility for the mistake of our existence, the too much that forces the creation and the poetry of the world, otherwise we would all be pure mechanics partaking in rational and efficient transactions, we are not. Let's go for picnics at the rubbish dump, let's wear clothes that make us look fat or stupid on purpose, let's eat food that has fallen on the floor for more than 3 seconds, let's take holes and tear them into bigger holes, let's...”

But when I ran out of breath
And my spitting diatribe lay in bullet-holes around us,
You took this moment to change everything.

You looked up at me from your
Pillowed head, something haunting your eyes
A quivering, a subtle divergence,
And with a smile, that wasn't quite a smile
But some kind of melancholy addendum
To your face, you said something
That melted all my stupid notions
And at the same time proved them all

"I don't think you have seen *real* imperfection"

And I didn't even hear your words,
I didn't need to, it wasn't about words anymore.
I felt the tragedy, that plunge and shiver -
Your beauty walked on corpses,
But you could see nothing but their stanky faces,
As if they were the reflected image of your own.
And my stolen theories and well-worn tirade
Suddenly became real – in you.
You didn't need overblown concepts
Or cleverly constructed lyrics:
Just a look, a gaze that crystallised it all.

And these are the moments that really matter
The glimpses behind the curtain.
The exhilarating glance into the beyond
And you were imperfect, toughly imperfect
But not in the way that you thought.

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DT: I liked the use of "stanky" in that poem.

MP: Stanky, I like the word stanky. I love the word stanky. Stanky faces...

DT: Stanky faces, yeah.

MP: I'm glad you like that word.

DT: What have been the main influences over your development as a writer and performer Martin Pettitt?

MP: Well, as a writer I would say one of the big influences was a guy that taught me at university. He's an amazing poet. He's thoroughly underrated and no one has ever heard of him and he has got a very plain name, he's called John James. You know him? I don't think

so. No, no, no, he's amazing he's a 60s lyric poet. And no one will have ever heard of him but he's amazing, look him up, he's got books on Amazon and stuff. And he taught me at university and he engendered this sort of idea of poetry in me. And I still love that.

I guess the other influence on me would be, there's an amazing book, which has another dull name, but it's by Raymond Vaneigem. He was a member of the Situationist International Movement. It's called *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. And it engenders this idea of poetry as spontaneity and radical energy, that just spurts out. Spurts out, whatever. And that's, I don't know, it's an essay, a poetic essay, sort of the perfect synthesis between poetry and an essay, like academic form, I guess. I would recommend anyone to read that book, it is phenomenal.

DT: That was going to be my next question. What would you recommend? Unless there's anything else of course?

MP: I mean, as a performer, I would say in my head I'm sort of half like the guy from Cabaret, you know, "*willkommen bienvenue...* I am your host" and Hulk Hogan "brother, my 24 inch pythons". In my head that's who influences me.

DT: Of doing the Hogan thing [INAUDIBLE].

MP: In terms of what I would recommend to watch... Yeah, yeah, "I am a real American. Fight for the right of every man", as long as you're American. Obviously. None of those other people. In terms of recommending, I mean, I'd recommend this book [The Revolution of Everyday Life] and John James and... I used to review a lot of theatre. I was paid to review theatre, a couple of years ago, and just going to see some ridiculous fringe theatre. Fringe theatre I think it's phenomenal and there's a lot of amazing stuff going on, like immersive theatre...

I went to see an amazing thing, it was set in a warehouse somewhere and instead of sending kids to prison, they'd sent them to this, it's called [The Big House Theatre Company](#). And they put on this production, and it was in this big warehouse, and it was immersive so you just wandered around. And it was absolutely phenomenal, it was about a girl who got pregnant and she was a boxer.

So I would recommend just going on the Internet and just going to see, just randomly, going to see a piece of theatre anywhere, doesn't matter, just take a chance on a piece of theatre. That's what I would recommend to do.

DT: Do it! Yeah, cheers Martin. Thank you.

End of transcript.