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[Episode 41: Mishi Morath](#) – (June 2015)

Transcription by Christabel Smith – (06/06/2017)

Host: David Turner - **DT**

Guest: [Mishi Morath](#) – **MM**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. I'm in Camberwell in South London and today I'm joined by Mishi Morath. Hello, Mishi.

MM: You all right?

DT: Yeah, good. As much as this podcast was never supposed to be a vanity project, I did start doing these to get to chat to my poetry mates, of which Mishi is one. We're going to start first with a couple of poems.

MM: All right, straight into it. Best thing about this podcast, I've got to say, by the way, is I didn't listen to them until David told me about them, this will be a wonderful one, not because I'm in it, but to have two people dropping their haitches, bloody marvellous. Anyway, for those of you who don't know me, I don't drink anymore, I won't go into detail but I've been sober for 13 years, and the two poems I'm going to include in this segment are about drinking. This one I wrote on a bus, I wrote a lot of my stuff on a bus because it's where it's easy to write, buses or trains, and this one's called;

Unclean

Moving toward
The back of the upper deck
Mistake!
I can see it's empty
But haven't seen why
My nose tells me though
Old Boy dirty clothes
Unwashed
Battered trainers
With holes in.
That was me just over
A decade ago
Except I was a lot younger
Though my body was as old as
That chap is now.
Right now
This very moment
I am not thinking
"What a pen and ink",
"Have a wash",
Or simply "You smelly cunt!"
No, I am not judging
But in contemplation
Rather than indignation
Simply grateful
That the drunk on the bus
Is no longer me.

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DT: Cheers, Mishi.

MM: Do you want me to go straight into the second one?

DT: Yeah.

MM: The second one I wrote very recently and it's football-related because I'm a big football fan. You'll get bored of this by the time it's over. It's about the greatest football team in the world, Dulwich Hamlet, a good local side, I've supported them all my life. Forty-one years, I've been supporting them, man and boy. This one's about Paul Gascoigne, I don't know if you're aware, a couple of weeks ago, he was on the telly apparently and everyone was saying how well he looked, even though he was still drinking. This one's called;

For Gazza

So you've been on the telly
Excusing your drinking binge
From one alcoholic to another
I hope this doesn't sound like a whinge.
For it's not ok to relapse
To binge drink & say everything's fine
Just because it's behind your closed doors
Where you guzzle back the wine.
Somehow you've got to pull yourself together
Who are you trying to fool?
Those drinking binges will kill you
I hope that doesn't sound cruel.
You can't go round making excuses
Claiming a bit of this or that is ok
Until you accept you must stop totally
You'll be found lying dead one day.
And it's going to be sooner rather than later
If you carry on the way you are
Alcoholism makes no allowances
For the fact you're a former football star.
I think despite their mock concern
The 'red tops' want you to do a Georgie Best
Reams of tales of crocodile tears
Even before you're laid to rest.
I hope you overcome your demons
But that's got to come from within
So please stop making excuses
And dump all your bottles in the bin.

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DT: Cheers, Mishi. So we'll move onto the first question now. As always, why poetry?

MM: Why poetry? It's a bit long-winded, I hope I don't bore people, and there's a Dulwich Hamlet connection. Like many South London boys, I grew up in council estates. I wasn't the

best-behaved when I was a teenager. Some might say a right annoying little shit, horrible bastard, it's down to interpretation, I'm sure you know the score. I messed about at school, I left school at 16, I had no qualifications, couple of CSEs, which were basically like O levels for thick kids or kids who didn't behave.

My only O level was English language, the only subject I enjoyed. Not that I was ever the most articulate, as you can guess, but I got on really well with my English teacher, Mr Power, wherever he is now, I know he's been brown bread for years, but he taught me at school, to have a little love of poetry. I liked writing poetry in my mid to late teens, then I just stopped, didn't give it another thought. Beginning of January 2013, there's a scheme at Dulwich Hamlet called the 12th Man and it's about supporters donating funds, ring-fenced to help the playing budget.

It was quite new and at the time, we had a right dodgy owner at the football club and one long-standing fan came up to me in the pub and he said, off the record between me and him, he's come into a little bit of money and he had £500 to spare, a one-off. He asked about the people who ran the 12th Man, was it kosher? He trusted me to say, so I reassured him on that. We were talking in the pub for ages – I told you this was pretty long-winded – and he said, somehow, he said I should elaborate, write more of my stuff in the old fanzines and that, and someone mentioned: 'He writes poetry'.

I said to him, threw up my hands, I haven't since I was a teenager. 'Well, try it,' he said. 'Just try and write one a day, if that. That might be too difficult, just do it and enjoy it.' I showed him a few and he encouraged me and that was in January 2013 and about September 2013, I discovered open mics and I went to Niall [O'Sullivan's] one, which is Poetry Unplugged, and it went on from there. I don't pretend to be any good at poetry, I don't know nothing about poetry, but it's something I enjoy and I've carried on doing it. Apparently, people like some of the stuff I read, some don't, but I enjoy it and that's the most important thing.

DT: We often talk about how you don't have an artistic background, but I was going to ask what your influences are as a writer and performer. You might say fuck all. If that's the answer, that's the answer.

MM: Yes and no. I wouldn't say influences, cos I don't know anything about poetry. You've got a catchphrase, which you put in Lunar Poetry, you mention it, is it: 'I fucking hate poetry'? You've got a T-shirt.

DT: Yeah.

MM: To me, I don't know if you remember, who was it, Alan Bennett, who did The History Boys? In the film, one of the kids in there, there was a throwaway line in the classroom, which has always stuck with me. He was asked what history was and he said: 'Well, sir, it's just one fucking thing after another.' That's all I know about poetry, it's just one fucking word after another. I don't know rules and regulations. My influence in poetry is actually just real life. I just write down, whenever I see a story in the paper, or something that's happened in real life, something I've seen, football, whatever.

DT: I've seen you at open mics and a lot of your stuff does reference what might have been in the news that week or current affairs. You definitely tend to take your influences more from what's round about you.

MM: I try not to generalise, because I'm talking about me, but I think it's very much a working-class thing. We're scared of poetry cos when you're at school, everyone read Wilfred Owen and all that 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'. What's all that bollocks about? But it can be interesting. You're just writing. A lot of mine rhymes a lot. I don't mean to make it rhyme, but I think that's what you naturally assume, poetry must rhyme, but there are no rules, as I say.

DT: There are no rules. If that's the way you're comfortable with writing, there's no problem.

MM: Before anyone asks, and people do ask me this, I'm quite proud of this, a mate of mine called Tony has just moved to Gillingham and he started writing poetry himself and putting a few on his Facebook. They are really good, I'm trying to persuade him to find an open mic, but he ain't got the bottle for that yet. If an idiot like me can, he can. I hold my hands up, I cheat with poetry, cos when I'm stuck, I use a rhyming dictionary, it gives you ideas.

DT: You're just being honest, that's not cheating. It's a natural thing to do. We're going to move on to another couple of questions, but we'll have some poems first.

MM: What have I got next? These two are football-related. It doesn't have to be Dulwich Hamlet, I do like watching other football. Everyone assumes when you're a football fan, 'oh, did you see the game on the telly?' 'Nah mate, got no interest.' They think I'm weird. I know nothing about professional football, not that I've got no interest in it, I see the names in the papers, but for me, I want to be at a game, watching the game. Professional's out of my price bracket really.

One of the things I always say, given the way modern football has changed, in all-seater stadiums, when you stand up and people say 'Sit down, sit down', my catchphrase is to turn around and say: 'Fuck off, if you want to sit down, go to the opera.' Then you actually think about it, going to your Arsenal's, your Chelsea's, it costs more to watch a football match now than it does to go to the opera. Who'd have thought that? It's crazy.

DT: Crazy. You are sat down and forced to watch football like being at the cinema now. There may as well be a screen in front of you.

MM: Absolute nonsense. Talking about screens, people pay now to watch games on a screen at a game when they can't get tickets or when their team's playing abroad. What's that all about? Anyway, this one's called Post-Match Chill and I wrote this after an away game last season. They didn't have Sky in the bar at the ground we were at and so we all went off to our local boozer to watch it. A couple of them have a soft spot for The Gooners and it was Arsenal vs Man United and this one's called;

Post Match Chill

I'm in a pub full of Dulwich fans
And I'm really bored to tears
We're here to watch the football
And knock back a few beers.
Well all apart from me
Got to stick to the soft drink
I don't need alcohol for my buzz
I've got my boys in Blue and Pink.
For my heroes Dulwich Hamlet
Have just won at Harrow Borough
Doing so quite professionally
Three one being rather thorough.
It's always nice to socialise
A group of us in the pub
But truth be told I don't watch telly football
And therein lies the rub.
I popped out to the local shop
Bought my Lottery to fuel the dream
Just because I love my football
Things aren't what they seem.
If I was rich I'd dip into top flight
But not on my current wage
I'm not totally against the Premiership
But high costs make me rage.
It's Arsenal against Man. United
I dread to think the price
If I could get to a live game
I wouldn't need to think twice.
Watching this match on the telly
It's not the same as being there
No matter the glamour of Premier League
If it's on the box I don't care.
You think you're oh so loyal
As you sit there nursing your half
Without any dream of going to the ground
You're really having a laugh.
Content to sit on the sofa
Down your local boozier
Never in a hundred years a football fan
You're such fake football loser!
You've never known the magic of the terrace
Bouncing as one up and down
As you spout your pub talk nonsense
Articulating like a clown.
I'd rather watch local county league

Down at the nearest park
Than get worked up by televised fantasy
Where the contrast couldn't be more stark.
Give me the honest graft of non-league
Over millionaire prima-donnas anyday
Seeing it 'live' on the box
Can't compare with Harrow Borough away
So I'll sit here chilling out writing this poem
Rather than watch this armchair caper
Warming to the contemplation
Of the report in tomorrow's 'Non League Paper'.

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DT: Cheers.

MM: I actually wrote that one in a pub when all my mates were around, watching telly. Obviously I'm sitting in a corner, not realising what I'm doing, and one of our lads, Ben, he's looked over and gone: 'Oh look, Mishi's doing a poem!' I was so fucking embarrassed. I didn't mean it in a bad way, but it was very embarrassing. This one's also football-related. I'm also, I suppose, I wouldn't say political, I'm what I call, I don't like to label myself, but I'm a leftie, whatever that means. This one's called Colour Blind.

If you remember during the General Election campaign, David Cameron was going on about multiculturalism and one of his comments was: 'You can support Man United, the Windies and Team GB all at the same time. Of course, I'd rather you supported West Ham.' Now he's actually, for those who don't know, he's an Aston Villa fan supposedly. The only connection between those two is they wear the same colours. This one's about that and it's called;

Colour Blind

It's well known we don't trust politicians
Always lying about their facts
But if you're from the terraces
This one stopped you in your tracks.
For this was a 'schoolboy error'
That no fan should ever commit
There's absolutely no excuses
Even if you know the colour of the kit.
As if it didn't matter
Such an easy thing to do
Not recalling who you support
But knowing it was claret & blue.
Does it matter you're Aston Villa
But slip up and think West Ham
Well ask those who stood on terraces
See if they give a damn!

Remember those things called terraces...
Fans penned in a cage
Politicians wouldn't go near football
It wasn't a vote winning stage.
Those of us who went to a match
We were the scum of the earth
Lowest of the low in society
As your kind gave us a wide berth.
Bring back National Service
"Hang 'em & flog 'em" you said in a rage
Leaving decent law abiding Scousers
To die at Hillsborough in a cage.
We were all labelled hooligans
Total scum with Nazi links
So different from those respectable Bullingdon boys
Who smashed restaurants for their high jinks.
Now that football's fashionable
You pretend you're like a common fan
Not that you mix with the great unwashed
Safe up in your executive stand.
You only claim to be Aston Villa
As your uncle was the main director
Maybe that explains how easily
You became a West Ham defector.
The best thing about your colours
Was the posh claret you drank
And never having had to buy a ticket
With your Chairman Baronet Uncle
Being the one to thank.
You might think your mistake was nothing shameful
A simple slip of the tongue
A bit of a fuss over nothing
Like your politicians taking a bung.
But for proper football fans
You're now a laughing stock
Equal to your record at Number Ten
You are a total cock.

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DT: So true, so true, Mishi. Earlier, you touched on reading for Poetry Unplugged for the first time. It sounded a bit embarrassing to admit in public you were writing poetry then coming along to read it, but how did you feel you were received by other people at the nights?

MM: To be honest, you concentrate so much and if you get a ripple of applause, you think: 'Oh, it's all right.' Poetry crowds are very polite, which is good. Maybe not so good if

they think you're shit but politely clap. I've done a couple of poems in different places and sometimes it's been stone dead and I think I've hit a raw nerve for whatever reason, and I think: 'Oh shit, that didn't go down too well, I might not read that one again.' I don't lose sleep over it. Generally, people have been quite supportive. They keep on using words like 'You're very honest' or 'You're different'. I don't know, it's just words to me.

DT: I'm glad you brought that up, so it didn't seem like me forcing opinion on you. I seem a bit more like an arty fucking wanker when I'm doing my stuff, so I get accepted a bit more.

MM: You got the movement, you just ain't got the accent.

DT: Yeah. I find words like 'honest' a bit patronising. It sometimes feels like you, or I, or other poets like Chip Grim are the token working-class poets and it makes the others putting it in that section feel better about the night they're running. Do you know what I mean?

MM: I don't want to upset anyone.

DT: I don't mean in a rude way, it might even be unintentional.

MM: Turning it round, even before I've heard someone read, if they've got a working-class accent, my heart's going thump, thump, thump, 'oh yes, they're one of us', which is I suppose snobbery in reverse. I think sometimes, if I'm railing or ranting about posh people, or gentrification in one or two of mine, some people think: 'That was very funny.' They don't realise, I might be taking the piss, not personally but generally, out of them themselves. I find that extremely funny.

DT: The point's often missed.

MM: I think so. For me, people either like me or they don't, at the end of the day. Some people are very patronising. One person came up to me once and said something along the lines of: 'I don't really like football, but having heard your poetry, I'd love to get to a game.' I said: 'Cheers, mate'. There's nothing I ever heard more wanky in my life, but if they enjoyed it, that's good stuff.

For me, I've got this awful expression, I'm now used to writing poetry and being a poet, I don't know if I'm a good one, a bad one, it's just a hobby for me, but for the first few months when I was reading, cos believe it or not, I find it quite difficult to talk to people if I don't know them, and you get to know the faces on the open-mic circuit, there's one poet, you've had him on here, I've got a lot of respect for him, Sean Wai Keung, he was very polite and friendly, and I had this awful phrase, which he kept on picking me up on, I kept saying: 'I'm not a proper poet like you.' I still occasionally use the 'proper poet' thing.

DT: I think you've stopped saying it as much, you used to say it a lot.

MM: It's very much a working-class defence mechanism. People like me ain't supposed to do poetry, but why not?

DT: Do you feel like you're a bit more part of the open-mic scene or have you just gotten used to it?

MM: I've got used to it, but I definitely feel part of it. I can approach people and chat to them and the majority of people will say: 'That was quite good, I enjoyed that.' They generally mean it. I've got used to the fact, like it or not – and I do like it really – I am a poet.

DT: We met at an open-mic, probably the first or second I did.

MM: That was the one in Dalston, Spoken Word London.

DT: That's right. So I've known you as long as anyone else I've known on the circuit. The first time you said you'd accepted you were a poet, for better or worse, it was a nice thing, because you are really good at what you do and more, you feel part of something. There will equally be people who don't like your stuff, because that's life. I'm interested to know that if you ever felt like you didn't fit in, but now do, was that a problem in your own head rather than anyone else's actions?

MM: Maybe one or two of other people's attitudes, but I think it does go back to the fact that I've very little self-confidence. But then, since I've been reading poetry, I'm much more confident. If I bore you with some football-related... there's another club called Hitchin Town, they were in the same league as Dulwich for many years, up until the 1990s and non-league was reorganised. They moved over to the Southern League, which is another league, same as the Isthmian league, same level, different part, it was geographical reorganisation, so we never played them anymore.

Last season, there was a threat to their ground from some local cowboy charity that owns it, who basically wanted to asset-strip and make millions. There was a big local campaign in Hitchin and I went up there, as a Dulwich fan, and two other Dulwich fans from our Supporters' Trust, I was there as an individual representing our club and they were there as Supporters' Trust and I spoke out in favour, obviously giving a bit of moral support.

I didn't realise it, but I went down really well and I'm not saying that because I did, the point I'm making is, looking back with hindsight, I would never have been brave enough to give that speech or whatever if I hadn't got the experience of reading at poetry nights. So it's not just about poetry, it's about improving your life, making you more confident.

DT: And finding a way to communicate.

MM: Sort of. People say I do that anyway, but what I portray publically is maybe not what I feel inside. That's another thing about poetry, not only do I enjoy doing it, it's also very therapeutic and if it clears my head a bit, for whatever reason, I'm not going to give specific incidents, in a way it doesn't matter, cos there are so many different ones, but if I'm putting it down and I write poetry, I feel better.

DT: On that note, is it one more to finish?

MM: I've got two small ones. Is that all right or am I taking too much time? I'm going to finish with two lovely morbid ones. This one I wrote after there was a phone-in on LBC about support for some bishops on assisted dying. This is called;

When The Time Is Right

As time creaks on
I start to fear
What will happen
When the end is near.
There's nothing wrong with me yet
No need to panic
I'm not going crazy
From my normal to manic.
But when I die
I want it to be quick
Scared of suffering
Terminally sick.
If ever that happens
I don't want to linger
Time to go
With the flick of a finger.
Is it too much to ask
To turn off a switch
A painless death
Without a hitch.
I don't want to suffer
Right to the end
Give me the option
Of a man's best friend.
One last farewell
A time to say goodbye
Small prick of a needle
A bit of a cry.
At the moment you can only do this
If you're comfortable or rich
Flying off to Switzerland
When pain's too much of a bitch.
Poor people like me
Have only the nearest bridge
If we want to die with dignity
To sleep in a mortuary fridge.
You preach "god's" will
Saying your prayer
Watching me dosed up with morphine
As if you care.
Pumping my body

With a multitude of drugs
Prolonging my suffering
From white coated thugs.
You warn me of Harold Shipmans
Stalking the ward
Well just let me take my chances
And die of my own accord.

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MM: This last one is quite topical, it's about when Charles Kennedy died a few weeks ago. It's called Another One Bites The Dust and it's about people's reactions to death and how people were so nice to him.

Another One Bites The Dust

I hope when I drop dead
You're honest about who I am
I'll be the one who's brown bread
So won't be able to give a damn.
If you're one who never liked me
Don't pretend that you did
Just say it like it really was
When they nail down my coffin lid.
I don't want a ton of plaudits
Like for that Charles Kennedy chap
If you must say it how it was
None of that pretend you liked me crap.
Because if you're someone who I don't like
I'm not going to pretend to cry
In truth I will be smiling
When it's your turn to die.
It's not that I didn't like him
But bottom line was he's one of them
And even though he's seems a decent bloke
At heart he was still a Lib-Dem.
Yes, he died far too young
And had a drink problem like me
But it's not as if I'm celebrating
More indifferent than full of glee.
He was a politician from the telly
I didn't share his views
In fact the only thing I'm sorry about
Was that it was him & not Simon Hughes.

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DT: Last question, is there anything you would recommend to people listening to go out and see or watch or do? Not necessarily anything to do with poetry.

MM: Two answers, the first is the most obvious. If you love football, there's a local non-league team in South London called Dulwich Hamlet www.dulwichhamletfc.london. Have a look on the website, even if you don't like football, you'll love Dulwich Hamlet. That's my plug out of the way, sorry, I couldn't resist that. The other thing is, this isn't aimed at people in the poetry world, actually I've just thought of one, so it's going to be two points.

One is, I love open mics, I love going everywhere, being able to say what you like, but when you look for your venues, and your one, Silence Found A Tongue isn't one of them, because that's a good one, can we find somewhere that's got affordable bar prices, whether they're alcoholic or not? It can get a bit expensive and you feel obliged to support the bar. Just a little hint there, we ain't all rich.

This one is aimed at people like my mate Tony from Gillingham, people like my mate Darren, who's just moved back to the London area. Darren's a mate of mine, I know he's been to poetry nights when he lived in Northampton, but he's never read, I was trying to persuade him to read at Paper Tiger the other night, but he bottled it. If you're working class and you write poems, there's nothing bad about it. If an idiot like me can read poems, it's nothing special. Just read from the heart and write. It's something there to enjoy. We're not supposed to enjoy it, that's my cliché, but do it and you can become a proper poet like me.

DT: It's important for people to remember, if you go to an open-mic thing, you don't get judged.

MM: It's not like a comedy night, you don't get heckled or booed.

DT: People are really supportive, especially if it's your first couple of nights. You don't get ripped to shit.

MM: In fact, any poetry night you go to, or the vast majority, if you've ever been to that particular night before, or you've been to others and it's your first time reading, you get extra support because you're always mentioned. 'Tonight we've got a poetry virgin.' People are even more supportive. They don't expect you to be some top poetry star, they'll just welcome you.

DT: We'll put a link to Dulwich to the video on You Tube. Cheers, Mishi, thanks very much.

MM: No problem.

End of transcript.

