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### [Episode 103: Rishi Dastidar](#) – (17/07/2017)

Transcription by Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Rishi Dastidar – **RD**

#### **Introduction:**

**DT:** Hello. Welcome to Lunar Poetry Podcasts. I’m David Turner. How are you lot? Can you hear that? That’s right. There’s nothing there but nature. I’ve moved to Wiltshire. Lunar Poetry Podcasts is now based in the South West of England, where it’s very quiet and there are ducklings at the end of the garden, wood pigeons and swifts, something squeaking in the tree.

Today's episode is a bit of a break from the norm, in that the entire episode is dedicated to one guest. This is because our Arts Council funding runs out in August and after that, we'll be returning to one episode a month and dedicating more time to individual guests. So I thought I'd get you used to the idea.

Today, I'm joined by poet and editor, Rishi Dastidar. We talk about his collection *Ticker Tape*, out through Nine Arches Press and the editing he's done for the Rialto and Josephine Corcoran's blog *And Other Poems*. After this episode, we've got two more Arts Council-funded episodes to come, after which we'll be uploading single interviews on the first Friday of each month.

I'd love to know what you think of the series so far, so if you go over to [www.lunarpodcasts.com](http://www.lunarpodcasts.com), you can fill out a feedback form in the audience feedback section of the website. Over there, you can also download a transcript of this conversation. As always, you can subscribe to us via SoundCloud, iTunes and Stitcher, or wherever else you access your podcasts. You can follow us at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook, Instagram and @Silent\_Tongue on Twitter.

Do remember, independent podcasts in general, not to mention ones about bleeding poetry, have no marketing budget and rely completely on word-of-mouth recommendations. So if you like what we do, please tell folk, either through social media or in person. Arts programmers and organisations need this, what with the Government and that. Thank you. Smiley face.

Onto the conversation. I recorded this in my flat in Kennington, South London, which isn't as quiet and idyllic as here in Wiltshire. For a start, the flat is under the Heathrow fly path and the P5 bus runs regularly outside, but Rishi admirably holds his own among the vehicles, creaking chairs and neighbours' kids. I won't keep you any longer. Here's Rishi. And me for a bit. But mainly Rishi. Enjoy.

### **Conversation:**

**RD:** I'm Rishi Dastidar. This is a poem from *Ticker Tape*. It's called;

#### A shark comes to dinner

Well it's not a shark as such, more the nebbish simile  
Woody Allen used in *Annie Hall*, the one about how  
Marshall McLuhan has to keep moving forward to  
massage the message. Anyway the dorsal fin is frantically

stirring the pot fretting that the lobsters, squash and carrots  
haven't been chopped finely enough according to the proto-  
hipster aesthetic because, would you credit it,

him with the teeth is afraid to bleed.

'Potluck *Kinfolk* style' she'd said, and he'd flapped a happy yes not knowing what two out of those three words meant, but hey! what did it matter? He'd seen enough *Masterchefs* to know you just had to do a journey, a chocolate fondant and some Alpine microherbs, then your life changed. Imagine the shock

when he discovered that an induction hob could be as dangerous as a pedestal, and she wasn't going to undo her apron for any old Jawsy-Come-Lately brandishing Elizabeth David's come hither Mediterranean words. 'Calm' she commanded, as she swept him

onto the table, and bade him wait upon her homemade pastrami. He looked over and tried to drool attractively. You've never seen a mammal wish so fervently to tell Linnaeus to stuff himself, become a slice of rye bread, gherkins, English mustard on the side.

©Rishi Dastidar, *Ticker Tape*, Nine Arches Press (2017)

**DT:** Thank you very much, Rishi. Thanks for joining me. 'Him with the teeth', I really like that one. Could we start by talking about the collection, *Ticker Tape*, and how it came about?

**RD:** So this is developing its own creation myth and story now, as well. So I think we have to go back to the spring/summer of 2015 or so. I sent some poems to Jane Commane at Nine Arches for *Under The Radar*, her magazine, and she'd taken a couple of those and in her note, she said: 'Whenever you're ready, I'd like to offer you some mentoring for a couple of hours, where we can talk about whatever you want.' Now me being me, I rather exaggeratedly interpreted that as 'ah, I wonder if...'

And so, towards the back end of 2015, I pulled together about 60-odd poems, just sent them to her, and in my notes said: 'I hope this is OK for mentoring. I think I've got enough here for a book, but it would be great to get your view on that.' Didn't hear from her for about three months or so and then spring last year, 2016, I get this note back saying: 'The offer of mentoring is still there, but I'd really like the book as well', which I was not expecting at all, so I was completely bowled over.

It took me all of about five minutes to say yes, basically, which in itself is a great tale. I only found out a few months ago that when Jane said: 'Send me some poems', she was actually expecting about 15, rather than 60, so I rather bumptiously sent four times more than I should have done. Now I don't know whether there's a lesson in there about best foot forward or whether I've a classic tale there of a bloke over-interpreting the instruction.

**DT:** There's an important discussion to be had there for people who haven't had contact with publishers or magazines much. How much of your work do you send to someone invited or unsolicited? Only a couple of publishers are clear enough on their website about

what they expect. Before we talk about that, maybe we can talk about what the timescale was. When a book comes out, it can sometimes feel like you've done that in a couple of months and everyone publishing seems like a genius.

**RD:** And it's not at all. Just flicking through, the earliest poem in here is from about 2011, 2012. Matchstick Empire is probably the earliest that's in there and it wasn't complete as a manuscript to send to Jane until These Things Boys Do, which arrived pretty much at the end of October, actually closer to December 2015. It's four years of accumulation.

**DT:** Wayne Holloway Smith said in an interview that Alarum was a collection of five to six years. It seems, four to six, perhaps seven years, is more of a realistic time line.

**RD:** That sounds about right. I'd characterise it as three phases. You've got the phase where you're generating and writing. There's drafting and redrafting within that. There comes a point where that phase finishes because you've got a sense that OK, I've got enough now. I've got enough that coheres, is coherent, and I'm starting to get the outline of the book. Then there is this sort of middle phase, where you are putting the book into some sort of shape.

For me, that phase was relatively quick in terms of moving from These Things Boys Do being finished, to actually going: 'OK, that was the thing I needed, what does at least the initial order of the thing look like?' And that was a couple of months. And then the process from Jane accepting it to it coming to a finished form is another year or so. So clearly, that middle bit feels very, very fast and that sort of feels like it's the bulk of the work for you as a writer, but actually, the longer year, once the manuscript's been accepted, is actually its own job of work in itself, but it certainly doesn't feel to me an onerous job of work, because I wasn't doing it on my own, I was doing it with wise counsel and input from Jane, with a sense, a definite goal of what we were trying to achieve.

**DT:** How much effort was put into trying to find a coherent theme that runs through the collection? Presumably that comes in the last year, is that right?

**RD:** Potentially. I've been shying away from saying there is a big theme in there. I know there's been a bit of a vogue towards it, to almost say 'yeah, this collection is...' I find it interesting, because you can hear almost in the way people talk about it, that's moving the collection to something that's almost novel-like, because suddenly you can say 60, 70-odd pieces of work cohere to this idea and that's fine, absolutely, but lots of collections don't do that and there's no need that they should.

A collection can be just a collection of the best poems that poet has written at that particular moment and they do not have to be presented with any particular theme or overarching idea. What the writer's concerns are actually then come out through that. Certainly when pulling it together, I had no grander idea than what is my best work. Now, within that, it's clear that certain subjects, certain topics, certain ways of addressing the world keep coming back again and again and again. There's no way that I would claim this is one big vision of a particular thing.

**DT:** Viewing editing as curation?

**RD:** Yes.

**DT:** I suppose that's where this danger comes from, there must be a theme in a book. Anyone who has read the collection will see themes, but they're pretty much themes within your artistic practice, aren't they? I suppose that's where my question came from. Did you just allow the work to fit together because it's all written by one person?

**RD:** I went into it knowing that a large chunk of the poems are, in some loose or tight sense, quote unquote 'romantic', going back to that slightly older definition of not just love and lust, but awe and wonder at the world as well. I knew that was going to be a strong strand and my initial thinking was OK, there's going to be some sense of traditional boy-girl arc in there. That's almost inevitable and inescapable, so that's going to be a large chunk of the work, but then, knowing there was going to be such a chunky political strand in there as well, which I definitely wanted, because I wanted that to be a marker, to say: 'Look, this is part of what I write about and it's not going to be a part that can be ignored.'

So I wanted that to be a statement. So immediately there, you're balancing two things which are pretty hard to cohere. Then when you've got Ticker Tape itself as the title poem as well, which sits somewhere between that romanticism and that political aspect, but also is a very urban poem. So then suddenly you've got those three things there. I could have spent time trying to develop an overarching way of tying those much more closely together, but actually...

**DT:** I suppose the longing in all of the poems is, I was going to say unifying theme, but I don't mean that.

**RD:** Its commonalities, its resonances, its themes. What really unlocked the book during the editing process is when Jane started to break it apart and put it back together and say: 'Its not an arc, it's a series of loops.'

**DT:** Ah, that's a nice way of putting it.

**RD:** And when she said that, that's when it suddenly all cohered, because suddenly that gives you permission to not worry about saying 'we've got to get from A to B', it's fine to go from A and then back to A and for these things to stand alone and then to move into another cycle. So in a certain sense, I often think of the book as being three movements. You've got this opening movement before Ticker Tape, which is as traditional as I get in terms of quote unquote 'love poetry', then you have this monolith in the middle and then you've got this more political stuff after that, the state of the nation stuff.

Then, almost as a coda, the sort of quiet plangency of the front comes back again. I wanted to round it off on that one. I definitely knew where I wanted to start and where I wanted to end. I'd always had Summer of Camus' Youth as the opening and I'd always had Theseus' Ship as the end because I definitely wanted those moments of quietude. I knew I wanted the swell of the book almost to be, from something quiet, to get as loud as it does and then

dip away again. I'd ensured that I'd given myself those fixed points, so then it was a case of making sure everything else fitted in.

**DT:** This idea of looping, rather than a longer arc, do you feel you'd have reached that point without Jane's mentoring input?

**RD:** The book Ticker Tape is a classic example of how editorial care, support, attention, intervention makes something 5, 10, 20 times better. Every writer needs an editor and it doesn't matter what art you're writing, there's no writer that cannot be made better with some form of intervention. The trick of it, as an editor, is knowing what form of intervention that is and how to deliver it in such a way that it works and the relationship is productive and mutually beneficial.

That's hard because every writer is different, every editor is different, so if you're an editor with multiple poets, multiple writers, how do you develop enough flexibility to work in the way that's maximally optimal for that particular writer? Jane might disagree, but I think I'm relatively easy to edit in the sense that because I have been an editor as well, I know what, relatively speaking, the task is. I know it's not an attempt to change my aesthetics or try and get me to write in a different way or do any of these sorts of things which are common mistakes when people start.

I understand that what we're attempting here is a shared project in trying to make this thing better and so, when you start on that basis of good faith, it makes the process easier. Often, people approach it as 'this thing is done, all you need to do is proof-read it and typeset it'. That for me, it just spoils, not spoils, it's a missed opportunity. There is always going to be someone out there who can make the thing better, so why wouldn't you take advantage of that? I almost view it like you find a co-conspirator, someone whose interest is to make the book as good as it can be.

**DT:** Are there any other examples in terms of having an editor you felt you could trust? Also, because there was first an offer of mentorship, do you think it made the editing process any different?

**RD:** Perhaps. Perhaps. I imagine that if I'd gone with a different place or gone with a different house, having a colder relationship might have made that a bit trickier, so already having this pre-existing editorial relationship through Under The Radar, that sort of helps and there's that familiarity with your work. I knew at some level it would be tricky to find a simpatico editor just because the work is, to put it politely, it's at one degree removed from the mainstream currents of most British poetry and I was going to resist any attempts to try and pare my style down or shave the excess off to make me sound more traditional or like current voices.

That's not what I'm here to do, that's not what I'm here to write. So that fundamental need was going to be someone who got the idea of what I'm trying to do in terms of maximalising what's going on in the poem. I was trying to cram too much into them, trying to fill them to bursting, even before we get onto the whole making up words and the over-italicisation and

all the rest of it. So there needed to be a fundamental grasping of that, which Jane gets. Jane very much licences my exuberance and a lot of my enthusiasm.

What she's very good at is knowing when I'm going too far and when it's starting to move to the stage when it's actually being tiresome and being larded on, but also knowing that for that effect to have its maximum impact, the underlying structures, the underlying shapes, need to be solidly in place. I can imagine there is a version of this book where it is tremendously tedious and wearing because it's looser, much more in free verse, I haven't worked as hard in terms of stanzas and line breaks and actually bringing shape to it.

I'm very, very aware that part of the reason I can get away with writing the way I do is precisely because there is some formal lyric discipline lurking in the background somewhere. Again, part of the editorial process was knowing where to accentuate that and where to put that control in.

**DT:** We're definitely going to get on to talking about editing a bit further, later on. I just can't take my eyes off the cover. I'm painfully aware that people can't see what we're talking about, so please Google Ticker Tape by Rishi. We might, if possible, put an image of the cover in the episode artwork. We chatted briefly about this, at the Peckham Pelican, when you did the Nine Arches showcase through Vanguard Readings recently, about how it's really refreshing to see a handful of publishers at least are really putting a lot of effort into book design.

I really hate it when people tut at me and say: 'You shouldn't judge a book by its cover.' That is bullshit. I know the visual look of the cover is important to you, it perhaps wasn't a press decision, it was something that was going to occur anyway.

**RD:** Part of that back story comes from the fact my day job is in marketing, design and branding, so I live in this world a lot. The actual impetus came from my colleague Sophie at work, who I sit next to and is the creative director at the agency. She was playing a lot of Monument Valley and at the time we were thinking about the cover, just really entranced by the visuals. She said: 'You know, your book cover should feel something like this, be something like this.'

I literally took that as the brief to my sister, who's an illustrator and animator, and said: 'Do you want to have a go at bringing this to life?' She had an early draft of the book as well. That's what came back. I knew pretty much immediately it was right, because between Sophie and Ria, they captured the essential bit of the book. In my mind, Ticker Tape speaks to some form of a Utopia, absolutely it does, and the fact it was this multi-hued, bright, glossy, glowing thing was just absolutely right, because at some fundamental level, it really brought to life not just my voice, but also the way that I wanted the voice to be seen.

**DT:** Just a very basic reaction, it's got that sort of Sin City element, this idea that you're just putting blocks down and building others. It's also got a touch of the [MC] Escher's about it, hasn't it? It doesn't look like you could quite walk round it.

**RD:** So you've got that loop in a sense again, which we come back to. You've got that sense of techno-futurist dynamism in there, which through jargon and through subject matter, the poems get to as well. Just actually the brightness as well. I think of a lot of the book as quite joyful, much as it's undercut by longing, there is a lot of joy in there as well, so I wanted that sense of upbeat and optimism there. That's in part why Ticker Tape is the title poem and the central motif, because those things are intentional, aren't they?

The sheer fun and frivolity of having a massive parade to celebrate some amazing achievement and success, but you also know there is the comedown after that, the emptiness after such a thing. There is the clean-up, there's the stuff that's left behind. I wanted those two things in tension there, but I wanted to flag the upbeat and the optimism as much, if not more than, the downbeat stuff because I think the downbeat is the traditional way a poet would go.

Again, this comes to thinking about difference, thinking about my position in relation to how and where everyone else is writing. It's just instinctive. If everyone is slightly more downbeat and saying: 'Look how grim the world is', I want to go: 'Well, it's not all bad.' Just as a point of difference.

**DT:** I think it works really well, the colour and there is a sense of optimism on the front cover and the back cover. In between, you can get a little bit darker, can't you?

**RD:** Absolutely. There is, sitting on my hard drive somewhere, an earlier version of the cover where it's a black background and the city is sitting on that darker thing. It looks super cool, but it just looks that little bit too cool and it doesn't quite give you... You know, I am not cool, I'm not a cool poet, and there's something lovely about the gaucheness that comes through this pop of colour here and the neon as well, that again speaks to the book and speaks to me.

**DT:** I think we'll take a second reading from the beautiful book.

**RD:** As I talked about it, I don't think I've read it properly before, so let me read These Things Boys Do. Let me tell you that Katherine Angel, the writer and critic, she posted a seminar on desire at Somerset House a couple of years ago and I went along to that. Katherine is such an interesting thinker and interesting writer and it was a really interesting conversation that people were having, so I was scribbling lots of notes and I knew there was a poem in there.

As it turned out, that poem had to be in the book, but it just wasn't coming, it was taking forever to arrive. Then it finally did and I think it's one of the longest poems to emerge from initial conception and knowing it's there to arriving. That was 11 months or so. Let's hope it was worth it. It's called;

#### These things boys do

I am an eel passing far out, a slitherer in the seminar. I  
do not volunteer that I was once accused of stalking a *dulcinea* –



– I didn't know how to put my rotting catch of love in a net,  
drag it to sell to the implacable in Tsukiji fish market, Tokyo.

Hina reminds me shedding clothes is not the same as shredding  
Englishness. But we might all have to be trial lawyers in bed;

capital wants us, wants us to be fluidly equable, but desire  
only comes from friction: a touch, an impression, a catching –

the necessary luxuries. No one mentions the angels in muscles,  
the joy of dopamine, being tied up with scarves that have

'attention' knitted into them. We need to get out of ourselves,  
kidnap the brain, duct tape it still. Do you remember the ticker-

tape of pleasure that parades through you when you're touched  
just right? *The body is good business* announces my she-god.

©Rishi Dastidar, *Ticker Tape*, Nine Arches Press (2017)

**DT:** Thank you very much. That's enough of the book. We should talk about the editing that you do.

**RD:** Yes. So the two big ones are the Rialto, where I was, along with Holly Hopkins, the second cohort on the editorial development programme, and that was a couple of years ago now, so 2015, 2014 maybe? There have been a couple of cohorts since then. That involved working with Mike Mackmin to put together one edition of the magazine and then Holly and I were let loose on another edition of the magazine, where we effectively put together a quarter of it.

The other place is And Other Poems, where I help Josephine Corcoran out with various bits and pieces. That's a different type of editing that's going on in part, because different medium, print versus blog, different editorial ethos and approach and what Jo is trying to do with And Other Poems as well. So they're both good tests and stretches of editorial skill, editorial judgement as it may be.

**DT:** I just wanted to say, if people don't know And Other Poems, they should get over there [www.andotherpoems.com](http://www.andotherpoems.com)

**RD:** The philosophy there is very straightforward and simple. Jo publishes the best of what's sent to her and what she likes and it doesn't have to be new or unpublished or whatever, it's just a chance for people to share what they feel is good, interesting, their best work or whatever. I think the way it's become such a clearing house, and I don't mean that negatively at all, but a really good chance for people to catch up with poems they might

have missed first time around in other places, there's a lovely sense that poets use it as 'this is a thing I was really proud of, can we see it again in circulation?'

I came aboard last year, to help Jo when she did an open call for submissions and she had loads, so I helped her edit and select and choose bits and publish. Then this year what I've been doing is curating a showcase of Complete Works 3, poets as well, so I've asked them to select some of their favourites, then I've been publishing them every Friday for the last couple of weeks, so we're just coming to the end of that in two, three weeks or so.

So clearly there are different things that happen when sifting through an open call. The Complete Works 3 stuff is not a commission per se, but that call is very much: 'I'd like your three to five best poems, please, or the ones you think are best, or whatever you're writing now and I will choose my favourites out of those.' It's a different task in the sense that you know the cohorts, the guys are working at such a high level, you don't have to worry about will they meet sufficient quality. Whatever they send is going to be good enough to publish.

The considerations then come in around: Are these the favourite aspects of their voice? Are those particular aspects of their poetics that I like? Is it roundly representative of their poetics for an audience that might not have heard them? How do I balance the range of subjects and concerns, because I don't want eight, nine weeks where thematically, the poems are similar? Chances are, amongst the cohort, that's not going to be the case, but I need to at least have that at the back of my mind.

Just very straightforwardly as well, a balance of rhythm and pacing over the couple of weeks, in terms of thinking, if I've got two fairly traditional-looking poems one week, am I going to push you the next week with something that's a big, Ashbury-like block of text? Things like that. There are those sorts of considerations as well.

**DT:** How far do you plan in advance with that?

**RD:** So I asked the guys in March, April, then we started publishing at the beginning of May.

**DT:** In terms of the run when the poems go out, how far ahead are you looking for your schedule of publishing? Do you allow yourself any flexibility to switch things around?

**RD:** A little, but generally, I'm scheduling and editing and prepping for posting about, two or three weeks in advance. So if I do suddenly have a fit of 'I want to change things around', I've got enough time to do so. But actually, the guys have been so good at responding in terms of when they got back and stuff that it's all come together relatively straightforwardly. I did, and it shows you how far the online world is not actually that different from the offline world, I did actually for the 10-12 I've chosen, I did actually put them out on the floor and see how they were feeling.

**DT:** The classic editorial shot of walking through the poems.

**RD:** Exactly and even knowing it's going out online, it's not going to exist as people's pages. I still find that's a really good way of working through the rhythm of something, even though I know people are not going to consume it whole, people are going to consume it in weekly episodes.

**DT:** What I really like about the blog format, especially And Other Poems, is the archive is there. You can access it as a block if you wish to. That's one of the major differences in putting out publications, that people may only ever see that one magazine and it has to work coherently through that. Obviously, there will always be a call-back to the history of the publication, but they all stand alone.

**RD:** Part of this betrays how I was trained. My first proper jobs were in journalism. I was a sub-editor. Most of my training was done on print, so I used to know my way round Quark Xpress with a dangerous facility, so I could lay out pages. One of the things I was taught when being trained was when you're looking at a page spread, you're always having to be aware that you're trying to grab the attention of people who aren't necessarily that interested in reading it. So what you have to do to the page to allow people ways in so they want to, so obviously headline, obviously picture captions, pull quotes, straplines, whatever it might be.

That training has never left me. Whether it's print or online, part of what you're thinking always has to be, I have to assume that people are not going to be interested. How do I make sure that I get at least enough, a sliver of your attention, to make sure that you stop and at least peruse this? This is why, when teaching in workshops, I bang on so much about titles and I bang on so much about first lines, especially in an online context, when you can have this disembodied poem floating about, or that's been tweeted or Facebooked or whatever, there isn't necessarily the context of where it comes from, you've chosen to engage with it so you might do it. How are you going to make sure that person stops and goes: 'der der der der der'?

**DT:** I'm definitely going to misquote this person, because I think it was Wayne Holloway-Smith quoting Luke Kennard and I'm not sure Wayne could fully remember the quote anyway, but it's in the episode where Lizzy interviews Wayne, but Luke said something along the lines of one of the biggest problems with modern poetry in the UK at the moment is it assumes an interest upon the reader into their life or their work. It's just that idea of how do you communicate and engage with people?

**RD:** I feel a rant gathering. So it sounds paradoxical, but I do try and retain the perspective that most of the people who I am trying to reach and who might be readers are not poets. I know concretely, whatever it means data-wise, that's not the case. We know that most poetry publications, whether online or offline in the UK, are consumed basically by fellow practitioners. My fear, my worry, is that not warps our editorial judgements, but to a degree sort of skews the way we think because it's a different beast to serve a fellow working practitioner than it is to serve the interested general reader.

Now, there is absolutely a discussion to be had about the fact that British poetry suffers from this lack of the interested general reader who doesn't want to be a poet, because it's

not necessarily healthy for an entire art form to only be consumed by people who are producing that art form. I love the notion and the fact, there was some American piece I read the other day, it was one of those 'poetry doesn't make any money, why is it still thriving?'

The argument that the poet put forward was: 'It's thriving because people read, people get inspired, people want to continue and participate in the conversation.' That's absolutely right. I'd add the rider to that, that the conversation is stronger if you have interested lay people who don't have an axe to grind in terms of being poets themselves, coming to the art form and enjoying it and participating in that world as well. That being said, I try and retain at least that idea that amongst the potential readers out there are people who are interested in poetry, consume poetry, but don't necessarily write it themselves.

I think that slight wrinkle gives me a slightly different perspective when it comes to some of my editorial choices. Not least one of those is being, we can call it tougher, we can call it being shameless, being more marketing-driven, but just actually banging my fist on the table a couple of times and saying: 'Who the fuck do you think is going to read this? Who is going to read another poem called Rain?' Christ almighty. At least trying to give people and leave people with the impression that it's OK to sell your work through the title, through the first line, it is not a diminution or corruption of your poetics or your art to try and at least grab someone's attention. I'm sorry if this sounds heretical.

**DT:** It really rings true with the way I built the foundation for the podcast. I was safe in the knowledge a lot of the poets I knew would listen, there were the guaranteed audience, still relatively small, but I wanted other people to come and listen, friends and family who had no interest in poetry until you present something of interest and open their eyes. Not open their eyes, that's patronising, but...

**RD:** I think you have to operate on the basis that most interested readers are intelligent enough that with a degree of contextualisation, framing it correctly, they will get what you are doing. Again, that comes from my training. I trained at the Financial Times. You know that most people don't engage with financial news unprompted. There is a work reason or whatever.

So you know you have to, without question, explain some pretty complicated stuff simply, but once you do, they will go on and chase those hares themselves, to throw in another metaphor. Again, that's part of what underlies my thinking. You frame things properly, you set things up properly, that should be enough to bring people through. This is not saying it needs to dumb down or cheapen, it's just saying you need to have enough ways in.

**DT:** Really simple things like not assuming knowledge on the listener. Don't assume they know what a form is, or what the context of a certain poem is like.

**RD:** Another thing I was taught, someone is going to read something for the first time always and will not know what you mean. So however much you know it, you owe it to them, that potential first-time reader, to make sure you've done enough to let them in.

**DT:** That's the perfect place to stop. It's a really good, strong message. A lot of programmers and organisers need to bear that in mind when they're claiming to the Arts Council that they're engaging new audiences. Thank you very much for joining us, Rishi. It's been great fun chatting. We're going to finish with a poem.

**RD:** OK. I always end with this. I don't think I've actually tried it inside, because when I do this on stage, I bellow it. Let's see how it sounds when I semi-bellow it. I always introduce it by saying: 'Everyone in the creative writing world has always used this word to describe this object and if you do one thing, never use this word to describe this object again.' This is called;

### Gunmetal

(for Ian E)

The sky vibrates like Mussolini's mistress's dentures  
in a Waterford tumbler

The sky throbs precipitately pink like the ululating  
oestrogen of a Take That fan

The sky is a "precious, precious green Edmund,  
a precious, precious green"

The sky is as cold as an ersatz gazpacho made out of  
a homeopathic Aldi tomato

The sky is as playfully obtuse as an obscure collection  
of Flaming Lips B-sides

The sky is as rigorously gloomy as a Bank of England  
economic prognostication

The sky is an edition of *Noel's House Party*: full of gunge,  
and the sound of a booming God laughing at our pratfalls

The sky is a flying change of leg in the dressage

The sky is a Tao Lin Google Chat endlessly referring to its  
own digital circularity

The sky is not the sky: it is the sea having got terribly  
confused at JobcentrePlus

The sky is an engine powered by steam and onions and  
polystyrene chips

The sky is just fucking awesome, ok, and doesn't need  
a weapons-based simile to make it so

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**DT:** Thank you very much. That was great. Links to where people can find you and books and stuff, I will put in the episode description, I think it's the easiest way. But just to repeat, Rishi's collection we've been hearing today, *Ticker Tape*, is out from Nine Arches Press, who have got some really great stuff coming out this year, not least *Stairs and Whispers*, which is an anthology we've been talking about a lot and will come up again in two episodes' time. Thank you, Rishi,

**RD:** Thank you very much.

**End of transcript.**