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### [Episode 42: Rosemary Tonks](#) (July 2015)

Transcript edited by Harriet Foyster – 23/05/2017

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guests: Lucy Reynolds – **LR** & Lizzy Palmer – **LHP**

#### **Conversation:**

**DT:** Hello my name is David Turner and this is episode 10 of the Lunar Poetry Podcast. Today I'm joined by Lucy Reynolds and Lizzy Palmer and we're going to be discussing the life and work of Rosemary Tonks. As many of you will know Lizzy Palmer is a poet, occasional Lunar Podcast host, and together we host Silence Found a Tongue, a monthly spoken word

night in Waterloo in south London. Lucy Reynolds runs a masters degree in [Artist's Moving Image](#) at Central Saint Martins and is a relation to Rosemary. Hello both of you.

**LHP:** Hello.

**LR:** Hello.

**DT:** Hello Lucy. And before we get going I don't normally do lengthy introductions but I think maybe it's important in this case as the subject of the podcast isn't with us today. So I just wanted to say that there is very little about Rosemary to read on the Internet which is in a way a reason in itself for making this podcast. I bring this up because I thought that those of you listening may be interested in the research material I used for this episode. And today I'll be referring a lot to three recordings in particular.

The first is [The Poet Speaks from 1963](#), a conversation between Rosemary and Peter Orr, the second is [The Disappearing Poet](#), a 2014 panel discussion chaired by Timothy Matthews and featuring Neil Astley, Neil is editor of [Bloodaxe Books](#), and [Sono-Montage](#), a 1966 BBC radiophonic workshop broadcast curated by Rosemary. All of these recordings are available at the British Library and I'll put all of the reference numbers in the podcast descriptions so people can just go and access those, they are available to the public, you don't have to request any of those. And now I'm finished with that, we will begin the discussion today with Lucy telling us a little bit about her relationship to Rosemary.

**LR:** Well, as I think I said to you earlier, my mother reminded me when I said "wasn't she my great aunt?" that no she wasn't. She was actually my mother's first cousin. And I don't remember meeting her because I was about two but I've got a little bit from a letter that she sent me talking about her remembrance of meeting me when I was still crawling around the floor of her house. But the thing that was very special I think for me and my brother and sister and my cousins is she decided sometime around the mid 80s that every year she would send us a letter and this is when she had supposedly, by any... By the standards of the poetry community, completely disappeared.

We all knew where she was but she didn't want us to say. She didn't want to see us, so she was in some sense living as a recluse. But she would write these wonderful letters and I've managed to find... I don't know, they've been passed around in various suitcases and shoe boxes from art college onwards, so I managed to find a few which has been wonderful and we've got them sitting here. And as you can both... Lizzy and David can see wonderful, quite spidery writing, very distinctive writing that she has. So in a way my relationship to her was through letters, through language in way.

And also through her reputation among the family which of course is quite a different feeling that you're going to get of somebody, a different impression from perhaps the one that the poetry community had. My mother talks about how she remembers going up to art college, she was at Saint Martins in the late 50s and early 60s, and coming up to London as a rather gauche young woman and being taken a little bit under Rosemary's wing. Rosemary would give her things like booklists of the things that she should read and she would go

along to Rosemary's soirees in the house that she shared with her husband Mickey in Hampstead, which I think then was certainly not you know full of rock stars like it is now.

And she said that Rosemary had this just amazing spirit and just lit up the room. She was incredibly witty and charming, very beautiful. So you know she was a kind of... The centre of attention very much. So it was interesting to hear that. So in a way my notion of Rosemary was before I even really had a chance to read her poetry because of course she tried to make sure that her poetry was banned really, or rather best to say taken out of circulation.

So we just got the stories of this aunt who just decided to withdraw from the world completely and how she was this incredibly vibrant personality who just took herself out of the world. And she was seen as a kind of crazy figure, really. So it's been wonderful. In a sense I think she seems a crazy figure but one I think that the family very much admired. I don't think she was an easy woman by any... There's the sense I get that. But there was definitely a sense that she had incredible talent.

**DT:** And that sense existed within the family, did it? People realised?

**LR:** They did. I mean they saw her as quite difficult. But then it's also, you know, my family and this is interesting because it comes through I think in her poetry, and in her prose as well, in her stories, that I come from a family which wanted to be very correct in a very English way, and she wasn't. But in some ways I think she was torn at the same time. She had a very unusual background in that she was her... Basically her father died when she was very young and her mother and father and her... She was born out in Africa, and when the father died I think of yellow fever or you know it was something like that, something that perhaps you wouldn't die of now, they came back over and the family was sort of accepting but perhaps you know could have been a bit more welcoming than they were.

It was a strange situation where her sister was married to... It's so complicated we really need my mother here for this! But basically two sisters married two brothers. So her father who died... She then came back to live with her sister who was married in a sense to the brother of her... Her mother came back and was... Sorry! It's probably good if we keep this bit in here, it explains my confusion around it! Put it this way, she was born in Africa, they came back for a while and then Gwendoline who was Rosemary's mother then met someone else and went back out to Africa with Rosemary. So Rosemary's stepfather and her mother went out and they spent some time there and then he died.

So they came back. So it's pretty not a great beginning but she was also sent off to boarding school as well. Away, you know when her mother was out in South Africa too. So she had a pretty, if you like, peripatetic beginning. And it's interesting that her husband Mickey also came from a South African background as well. But she obviously saw that as something which was interesting to her and I think perhaps if we look at her poetry there's a sense of looking to other horizons beyond a purely British one but also feeling stifled by the British context but not able somehow to escape it either.

**DT:** And it's interesting that you say she seemed quite difficult and was maybe regarded as a little bit crazy as well by her own family because she does... I mean I really urge people

to listen to the interview with Peter Orr because she's one of the most eccentric voices I've heard in a long time. But at the same time you know she just...

**LR:** You mean in her accent or in what she's saying?

**DT:** Not just the accent but the way she says things. Because it's not like it doesn't make any sense, she speaks very clearly and passionately about her work and the work of others. It's just she's wonderfully eccentric. I would've loved to have spoken to her.

**LR:** Yeah. So I think the family didn't quite know what to make of her. And they were sort of in admiration, but didn't quite know how to take it further. Saying that, the reason that she moved to Bournemouth in the end was because my great grandmother, who was the sister of her mother, was very kind to her. And she moved there to be near my great grandmother, who we called Gar as children, who lived in a home in Bournemouth. So that's why she was in Bournemouth. Where everyone thought she was on the hippie trail, someone who had got lost, somewhere really more glamorous. No she was in Bournemouth.

**DT:** Maybe we could hear one of the letters if that's okay?

**LR:** Yeah. I thought what I would do is read the one that I read perhaps before that you heard. And this was from... I won't read the whole thing necessarily, but this is from... Oh it says we've got plenty of tape. We could, it's up to you?

**DT:** Oh no read the whole thing by all means, please.

**LR:** Okay cool. So this was dated the 17th of December 1990, and as I said she would send us one... Every Christmas we would get the letter. And it's worth remembering that she'd never met me but there's this incredible sense of warmth and generosity that comes through. Anyway.

**LR:** "Dear Lucy, I got your letter at the end of June and was so very pleased, thanks." And that's underlined with an exclamation mark. "Written on the train too, between Paris and Geneva. How well I know those night trains out of Paris. What a fight to get a pink ticket for the first sitting for dinner. The thing is to lurk beside the dining car with a calm assurance and intercept the steward before he can run away. Very swift on their feet. You must be very well organised to be able to get down to letters. Though I must say it's a good time to polish off the extras, the luxuries really, which are not in the mainstream of one's life, mainstream being..." and this is in brackets, "(career, clothes, money.)"

"Very nostalgic for me were the wagon-lit cars, waiting along dark platform which I boarded every spring and autumn to go down to Italy. Nevertheless I jump for joy that I no longer have to do it. You get tired of getting on trains and having to be well-dressed and sophisticated. A thorough going nuisance. And I was always loaded down with terrible tasks such as pick up the Fiat from the factory in the so-and-so, and drive it through Naples onto the ferry for Ischia. The Fiat would turn out to be faulty, I remember one of its merry tricks

was to veer out into the oncoming traffic when you pressed the foot break. How I ever got it out to Ischia I don't know. Somehow I did. [inaudible] Lucy? How glorious."

"You give me a most valuable snapshot of it. I had no idea you were such an experienced traveller. Of course I was in West Africa at eighteen, drawing the local tribespeople but living safely with my step father and mother there. Quite a different matter. You have to arrive from the outside, self-supporting, and get under the skin of the place by your effort. It takes grit." And she's put in the corner here, she says "Lagos where my father is buried. How interested I was to read your thoughts on the Reading Fine Art course and the people you have met. You seem to be getting the maximum out of it, both skills and people. I do believe this to be a gift of God, to have a happy knack of being interested in everything i.e. the art of learning. A young man I knew went up to Oxford and just sulked, criticised everyone, wasted his valuable time and finally got sent down."

"I do remember you, aged about two, in our house in forty six Downshire Hill, Hampstead. You were put down in the middle of the room but immediately set off to explore the backs of the armchairs. Very sensible. Yes I do so agree that we should treat the human brain with respect. Here is an interesting thing you discover, you are where your mind is. The other day I was in an old junk shop here talking to the owner and suddenly I looked around for Gar. Reason, the last time, say five years before, I been with that person among those objects. She had been with me. I had just slipped back five years and was a hundred percent back there. So the mind, spirit, is outside time" and those words are underlined.

"Proust discovered the same thing but he never followed up the huge" underlined "implications. Only the body is within time and subject to eventual destruction. But the mind is a spiritual thing, a spiritual body. Since people can't see a spirit, they don't take the matter seriously. But you can see a spread expressing itself in someone's body. There it is, activating the whole body. And you know once what kind of spirit it is, nice or nasty."

"Of course we also have non-human spirits, minds" she has in brackets, "going about invisibly on the world. The evidence being those awful temples containing horrible effigies all over the east." And she's got a little star here and she's put in brackets "(it's beginning here with crop circles and UFOs. In no time we shall get temples of some sort and heathen worship, horrors)" underlined. And then she says "I continue to think and often worry" underlined "about you. Many thoughts and much love. Rosemary."

**DT:** Thank you very much. Now I thought it was important to include the letters today because what little there is to listen to on the internet or research or read about Rosemary obviously focuses solely on her poetry because that's what's available to read. And there aren't many people that have a personal relationship to her. But I think you miss a lot by only comparing Rosemary's poetry, as often done, to Rimbaud or Baudelaire.

Because you miss her as a person and it's very intimate, the poetry, and I think she's often seen, or spoken of as being quite a difficult and brash person but I don't feel like her poetry is that. I think it is very accessible. The language may seem a little complicated now but if you take time with it it's quite open.

**LR:** I guess a lot of my work is around feminism and of course I think you know a woman, at that time, a very beautiful woman, outspoken bright, clever, of course everyone was going to call her brash. She's completely overstepping the mark. I mean she never saw herself as a feminist. But then of course women in that time played off against each other in a way. Another woman might have found her quite threatening in a sense because she was such a strong and forceful personality.

But I think that's very much... She was caught in that time, in that age. Perhaps if she'd been a young poet like you Lizzy now, she wouldn't be having to have gone through the things that come through in the poetry, don't they? That sense of being held back and you know she talks about London particularly with both this love which it does have a Baudelarian aspect to it if you think of [The Paris Spleen](#) but at the same time a kind of horror for it, how stifling and small minded it is. Imagine that against those skies around in Africa, the difference that must have been for her.

**DT:** And Lizzy since you've been to the British Library as well to listen to the recordings, has your idea of Rosemary changed from just having read her poetry?

**LHP:** Yeah I mean I've always felt, reading her poems, that I am definitely getting a sense of her character and who she is. Like you say though do you. Come across as being very intimate, true and honest. So yeah I suppose... Actually hearing her voice even, that alone has changed my image of her, I suppose a little.

**LR:** How did it differ from what you thought it might sound like?

**LHP:** I didn't realize she was so posh, but I think it's just bringing it to life I suppose, hearing a person and obviously speaking to you Lucy and getting more of an idea of who she was. Yeah I mean I suppose she doesn't seem wildly different from what I'd imagined from hearing your letters and what you've said about her.

**DT:** I suppose yeah you had already had an insight because, just to give context to this conversation, Lizzy and I met Lucy at an artist talk at the [South London Gallery](#) in Camberwell where she read the letter that she read just now for us. So we've already had a chance to talk to Lucy and find out a few personal details.

**LR:** Yeah it was a really nice coincidence, wasn't it? That I'd been invited by this wonderful young artist [Dorine van Meel](#), whose own writing is wonderful...

**DT:** It's fantastic yeah.

**LR:** ...To be in conversation with her. And we said what we would do is bring pieces of writing and share them with each other rather than it being 'in conversation' which I seem to have to do a lot of. And yes it's wonderful when you two came up to me afterwards and that she happened to be a favourite poet of yours. Yeah because I felt I wanted to bring something personal to the conversation but also a way to honour Rosemary. So that was wonderful. And I keep meeting young artists and poets who... It is so exciting, for me but for the rest of my family too, to feel... Again I was talking to my mother about this and she said

Rosemary wasn't the most... She felt Rosemary was waiting for younger generations perhaps than her.

This is why Rosemary's letters to me were so warm. But the feeling we had that Rosemary would be incredibly excited by the... She wouldn't be happy at all, we all know that, about her poetry being put out there again. But it has to be. But I think the one thing she would be happy about is the inspiration it is providing Lizzy for you and other poets definitely.

**DT:** I wanted to move on next to talk about Rosemary's life and publishing history, but maybe we can start with... I really love the quote when she's talking to Peter Orr in the recording, in the interview, and she talks about the poets of her generation. She felt like she had no connection to them because they lacked passion and they lacked the ability to realize the passion of real life. There's a quote: "you can have a tiff with your wife and that's enough to write about." You know she didn't feel like people were writing about the important matters. And she did seem to have a lot of faith in the future generations that they would come back to that.

Actually just one small point about the letters, in the Disappearing Poet panel discussion mentioned that it's very important to remember that when Rosemary took herself off to Bournemouth that she stopped writing poetry but she did not stop writing. You know she really threw herself into writing letters and keeping diaries and stuff. Do you feel that by... Just as you were reading I had this idea that maybe by stopping writing, giving up poetry in a sense, she was able to communicate freely again in another way, and that's why she was able to come back to writing letters?

**LR:** I wonder. I don't know. I think maybe this is an overly romantic thing to say but then she was into Baudelaire and Rimbaud so I think I'm allowed to say that! I'm looking to you Lizzy here, I don't think that if you're a writer you can stop yourself. Maybe you close off one particular channel but you open up another. I mean one thing we haven't.... Well we'll talk about why she disappeared later, but I do you have if you just bear with me, I have something here where she's talking about her writing when she's saying she's not doing the same kind of writing but she's doing academic writing instead. So maybe that kind of answers your questions. Sorry you can probably hear in the podcast this is sound effects!

Maybe it's this one. This is from '87. So this is the first, the earliest letter that I've got of hers of the ones that have kept. "No I don't write any poetry now." And she says "I was building up my academic reputation when my eye op came along" and we can talk about this I guess. "This meant articles for The Times or The Observer. I remember I actually did a translation of a poem by Botticelli for them, amazing waste of time. Or The New York Review of Books. It was prestige work for tuppence, but I found that..." And she's underlined this... "Mental training very useful."

"Now that I study the Bible, this past discipline has been..." and this is underlined "Enormous advantage. Exactly the preparation needed because your mind is alerted to unravelling mysteries hidden in words." So I don't know if that answers a little bit what you mean. But she hadn't stopped writing or reading and I don't know what she was... I can't remember in the Peter Orr interview if she talks about what she was reading other than

Baudelaire or Rimbaud. They're always the names that get brought up. There must have been others.

**DT:** I don't remember off-hand no. So maybe we could talk a bit about her publishing. She was published quite young, wasn't she? She published short stories first.

**LR:** Yes, children's stories. At about 17/18 she was already writing and getting short stories for children published but actually interestingly thinking of Sono-Montage, she was actually selling them to the BBC to be on [Children's Hour](#). So she was quite interesting in that she always had a sense of audience for children there. And I think the poetry just came from them and she didn't have a university education at all. She had... And of course boarding schools then would have just been about training them to breed nicely, wouldn't they?

There wouldn't have been any decent education there. So she was pretty self taught, and I think it just all emerged around the same time. But I really... Yeah that I couldn't really answer. I don't really have the details of that but Neil's book is pretty good. There's a short autobiography in the book, a biography rather, which puts all that in the right kind of order.

**DT:** He did a huge amount of work didn't he? Collating all of that together.

**LR:** It's amazing what he's done. I mean just all... For years he's just wanted to, you know, when she was alive he was talking to my family, to my Aunt Jill and my mother about you know 'can we please tempt her out!' But she wasn't having it.

**DT:** I don't want to keep referring back to the other recordings but in the panel discussion he says that having seen her diaries after her death that he managed to find a date which matched up when he had sent her a second postcard letting her know that the Radio 4 [Lost Voices](#) programme had been out about Rosemary's disappearance, while she was still alive. And she simply referred to it as the second postcard from Satan.

[Laughter.]

**DT:** And she would have just seen it as some sort of temptation to come back into publishing poetry.

**LR:** Exactly, I think she was absolutely... Well I guess we'll talk about this when we talk about her disappearance. But after... Well Lizzy is going to read a response to her poems, and I'm really looking forward to hearing your poetry. That's what would excite her.

**DT:** Yeah I mean that's... Actually a question to Lizzy. What is it about her work that drew you to want write a response?

**LHP:** I think just because it's so passionate and as we've heard her say in recordings and interviews she... You know why isn't everybody writing about the grand passions anymore? Things like that, and I think I agree in a lot of ways with what she says. I have quotation actually which is in the front of her first collection of poems where she says "I want to show

human passions at work and to give eternal forces their contemporary dimension in this landscape." And I think I just find that appealing, I suppose.

**LR:** But that's so interesting Lizzy because in the letter that I read she's talking about internal forces there isn't she? So that sense is something that never left her.

**LHP:** Yeah. It seems to come across quite strongly in everything really.

**DT:** I mean I admitted to Lucy when we first met I was unaware of Rosemary's work. It was more her life story that I had heard a bit about, and it sort of reflected or mirrored a lot of things in my life. But having read a lot of Rosemary's stuff now I'm not at all surprised that Lizzy is such... That Rosemary's way of thinking about poetry appeals. How do you feel about Rosemary's... She talks a lot about feeling alone. I just wondered how that weighs up against her need to communicate with people and wanting to feel connected to people. It's not an uncommon thing with poets is it?

**LHP:** I mean it's interesting actually. You've said already about her being torn between things and it is something that's come up a few times for me in different ways. You know some sort of antagonism. Particularly... It seems like being the passionate poet character and how I think a lot of us would describe it as sort of being like an affliction in a way. But also quite enjoying it. I don't know if I'm just reading into it but I kind of get that impression from her that there's that.

**LR:** But there must be, I imagine, and tell me what you think because I've said this to you before, I write but I write as an academic. Because I'd be too scared go into that arena of creative writing in any sense. I have a structure into which I can write. You know I have to footnote, you know there's various things so that keeps me safe and sane in a way. I can't find the letter that I got from Rosemary but it really stayed with me and I really hope I will find it, where she talks about the isolation. But also the one thing I know just a little bit, and I imagine that Lizzy you must really experience this, when it's going well it's the most fantastic drug.

It's hallucinatory, it's vivid, the sense of how you are able to access corners of your mind in particular ways and what comes forth. I can see how it could be very... Well maybe that's why Rosemary talks about Satan. In the sense that there is something so compelling about it, isn't there?

**LHP:** Yeah. I certainly feel that way myself. I mean it is a very solitary thing to do and I think yeah there is... I don't know I suppose it's going back to why you do it in the first place, but wanting to express yourself and how you feel but then taking yourself off into a little room by yourself to write it down and then maybe show it to people maybe not. I don't know. It's a bit of a strange... What's the word? Contrast, I suppose, which is something I think about a lot anyway.

But like I say I do get the impression from the way her character comes across that perhaps she was maybe torn between those things. And like you say when she was writing poetry and was quite well known she was holding soirees and was clearly very sociable, the life and

soul of the party it seems, but then also obviously then she gave it all up. It's an interesting one.

**DT:** Just while we're talking about the reasons that you felt like you wanted to write a response to her maybe we could take the first couple of poems, it would be a good time for you to read. So we'll begin with Lucy.

**LR:** So I'm going to read a poem of hers which I particularly love. It's quite a well known one I guess, Orpheus in Soho.

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

**[00:31:11]**

**DT:** Thank you very much. And Lizzy?

**LHP:** Yes. So I wrote this more as a response to the overall feeling and atmosphere that I picked up reading her poetry and the idea of her character that comes across through the poems. It doesn't have a title.

I realise, as I pace the fluctuating walkways of London dusk and dawn,  
as I pass from bedroom to café, dark desolate bed to deserted café,  
along side streets of discreet grandeur, through dust and mud  
in the dinge of hungover alleys, the Bedouin she has walked them before,  
in dressing gown, cigarette smoke evaporating into the dim chill  
amid dissolving illusions of day or night. The clear airy vessel of the city,  
and the furtive entanglement, and the oscillations of everything that never  
changes,  
she dreamt it all already. I must not forget.  
The lure of a dark corner, and the chance of escape from a choking decay.  
In my condition on emerging, grubby and dog-eared, or freshly broken open,  
I am ready for rinsing, whether by coffee or alcohol, or by the atmosphere  
alone,  
but the Bedouin she walked here first, and she is still here to be felt,  
gown a holy robe, cigarette smoke incense cleansing the new dawn air  
with the fog of memory. A reminder.  
Do not forget her, though she may have wished you to.  
©Lizzy Palmer

**DT:** Thank you very much.

**LR:** That's wonderful. That's fantastic. What a pleasure to hear that.

**DT:** Yes so listening to Rosemary speak about her own work it seemed that the audience was very important to her, which might seem like a silly thing to say but it's not always very important to a lot of poets. And I was wondering, because I didn't realise until you

mentioned it earlier Lucy that she'd written children's stories for radio. So it's very possible that her interest in how her audience would receive her words could have come from those early experiences, especially as she was drawn to writing children's books anyway. So I'm just wondering from both of you really, what sort of sense you get from Rosemary with her view towards her audience?

**LR:** Well I guess... Can I take that question in a slightly different direction David? And just ask, because I was curious when you said some poets aren't interested in audience. I mean Lizzy do you find that?

**LHP:** Yeah it's a debate that comes up a lot between all of us.

**LR:** I'm really curious.

**LHP:** I think different poets certainly have different relationships with the audience. I mean obviously some put more emphasis on the performance side and perhaps rely a bit on audience reaction. Without getting into the page/stage debate that always comes up!

**DT:** Well we could get into that in a moment.

**LR:** Page/stage?

**LHP:** So you know writing for the page or performance.

**DT:** It's funny isn't it? Because I think both Lizzy and I would assume that that's quite a contemporary debate, whether there is a divide between the stage and the page, but it actually comes up, it's a question from Peter Orr to Rosemary Tonks.

**LR:** Well if you think about the period when she's writing you know this is the period of the beats.

**DT:** Yes, and [Incarnation](#).

**LR:** Exactly so what's so interesting I think is that she was slightly held apart and not interested... It seems that she's got a problem with some of the rather stiffer poets of the time. But when I read that I'm like well you know what about Holy Communion? What about what was going on at the Royal Albert Hall? I mean that wasn't stiff. That was... Well I don't know if you have seen the film by [Peter Whitehead](#)?

**LHP:** Yes we watched it the other night.

**LR:** I mean that's madness! I think there was a fair amount of substances there involved there was there not? But I just think there was that whole burgeoning of that. And I kind of wondered why... Maybe she was just a generation a little bit too old.

**DT:** Do you think that Rosemary might have just rejected the need to have to have some sort of substance in order to feel those passions? You know I think there could have easily

been a big divide between those who felt that it was enough to live life to feel those ways. And then there was a new generation coming that were talking about taking certain substances in order to heighten these experiences. That looks like it could be quite a clear conflict, although it is quite prevalent now in society. I can't really put myself into the position of knowing what it was like before that happened.

**LR:** It's funny isn't it? I mean I think there is a generational thing, I think she was an older generation and I get the feeling from what I have read around, and again it would be interesting to know what Neil would think around this, is that she didn't have a lot of truck with that scene. But at the same time the reason I got interested in Sono-Montage was an old cutting of my mum's where she's standing next to [Alexander Trocchi](#), you know famous poet heroin addict. So the fact she was doing stuff with him says that there were connections there.

**DT:** I was very interested to hear her answer to Peter Orr when she said poetry should try as far as possible, as much as possible, to work in the ear and on the eye. And she said almost the perfect poem would work in both ways. It's just so difficult to get them to. You maybe have to settle for one or the other. So she seemed quite open minded that poetry could be purely for performance as well. But you should be, your ultimate goal should be, something that works in both forms.

**LR:** I mean do you agree with that Lizzy? The idea of page and stage. I mean I'm not a poet, I just know that when I read Gertrude Stein who's one of my favourites, you have to speak it.

**LHP:** Yeah, no certainly more recently since I've been performing my poems I think that is quite important. I would agree with that. I mean I write poetry which is definitely more for the page if you want to put it into either the bracket. But obviously I love to perform it as well and I think if it can work in both ways then definitely, and I think it's a shame for poetry not to be read aloud.

**LR:** But I guess it does place a certain vulnerability on... I imagine if it's poems you write something with a real intimacy then you're sharing a different kind of intimacy with a book. People open that page and you feel you're speaking to them in that quiet, meditative space in their own time. But I guess if you're up there on a stage with people looking up at you, to put your emotional world out there.

Yes see again I'm in such awe, because I only talk about other people. In fact I spend a lot of time... Kind of feels like I'm footnoting people's drug use from the counterculture rather than actually... You know I think to put yourself out there must be tough. And I think for Rosemary I'm sure she would have put this front on wouldn't she? The sparkling hostess front, but I shouldn't think there was a sparkling hostess underneath, that much.

**DT:** And there's also quite a subtle difference between... You know saying that you don't write for an audience is not the same as rejecting an audience. The difference could be that you write purely for yourself and hope that people like it, that's still writing for yourself and

not for an audience. Whereas it seems that, I personally think that, Rosemary is writing for her audience. I don't think she's writing just for herself. You know I think it's...

**LHP:** I think it was in the Peter Orr interview as well about what a lovely thing it is to write something well enough that it makes someone else respond. I think she did place importance on that.

**LR:** Well she's done good then. You've done this wonderful response here, it's fabulous.

**LHP:** Thank you.

**DT:** And since we've mentioned it a couple of times when we were talking about the sound of poetry and how it works we're going to move on and talk a bit about this BBC radiophonic workshop programme called Sono-Montage which was recorded in 1966. So the radiophonic workshop was a BBC department which was tasked with developing sound effects and theme tunes and most famously came up with the Doctor Who theme tune, so that will give people an idea of what kind of thing they were up to. They used lots of wah pedals and loop machines and synthesisers.

**LR:** But it was incredibly experimental in its time.

**DT:** Yeah really experimental, and it's well worth just trying to find photographs of the studio because it looks amazing because the equipment was all so massive and there were just banks and banks of tape reels. So in order to introduce this programme, or this particular subject and in lieu of having, at the moment permission to play any clips from the BBC programme itself, I'm going to paraphrase Rosemary's introduction to the programme. Sono-Montage is an experiment to combine poetry with electronic sound. Its aim is to put a dramatic edge on poetry read aloud and that edge is sound. What you hear in the recordings are sound collages or sound illuminations.

In the case of these sound collages the poem is the dominant partner and is all-important. In the past whenever music has been combined with poetry I've had the feeling that two strong art forms were fighting for my attention and that they were mutually exclusive with a tendency to listen to the poetry on the music's terms. And so as a poet I wanted to find a partnership which was much more equal, or one with the favourable balance on the side of poetry. And I'm going to begin with talking to Lizzy because I just think it's amazing that, particularly the second paragraph there, a lot of poets I know in London now are having that discussion still, about the idea of collaboration between musicians and poets.

**LHP:** Yeah. I mean it's something I've recently become interested in perhaps doing something of my own along those lines. I recently performed at a night where I had musical accompaniment and I've never done that before. It was a bit weird to read with that! But I think yes she was very ahead of her time in doing that kind of experiment and obviously putting the importance on the poetry over the music which is unusual now. If you go to sort of mix nights of poetry and music it's usually the music that has more audience members coming to hear, and more interest.

**DT:** And especially with the ease of putting music to poetry now, with probably what would have been a whole studio in the BBC in the 1960s you've got the ability to replicate all of those sounds on a mobile phone now. So a lot of people are attempting to put music... But it's not always working is it?

**LHP:** No.

[Laughter.]

**DT:** And you know regardless of whether the Sono-Montage project worked or not, it was a very interesting project to get going and publicly funded in that way.

**LR:** I should say, just on Sono-Montage, it wasn't something... She took it to the BBC but before that it had already been performed which I think was when Alexander Trocchi was involved, which was the year before at the Hampstead Poetry Festival. So it was definitely a live, one-off live thing first.

**DT:** Because if you try to find it on the Internet actually there are a lot of different sources because it's not originally a BBC production so it's not always linked back to a reference number with the BBC so it can be quite tricky to find sometimes.

**LR:** I don't think there's much out there is there? Is there much on it?

**DT:** There's an amazing page called [WikiDelia](#) which is a wiki page site just for [Delia Derbyshire](#) who was the head sound engineer at the radiophonic workshop with anything that ultimately went through there, there's a tiny, tiny, compared to other programs, really tiny paragraph about the Rosemary Tonks program because there's so little about it, there's no 'how it came about.'

**LR:** Well I should say that there's great young researcher [Thea Smith](#) who's an artist and a performer who's doing her MA at the moment and she's making Sono-Montage quite an important part of that in relation to the radiophonic workshop. She also is a publisher, one of the publishers of [SALT](#), I don't know if you've come across SALT? It's a feminist art magazine, so she's doing really great work on that and just gathering all the sources I'm hoping that she'll be able to publish that somewhere at some stage.

**DT:** What were your thoughts on the radio programme itself Lizzy?

**LHP:** I thought it was great. Yeah, I think it's a shame that more... After that was done that more sort of similar things didn't come about.

**DT:** It's strange but I suppose that reflects the whole of the counterculture, doesn't it? You know as this Sono-Montage went out in the same year or the year before you'd had Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall where seven thousand people turned up to watch poets and proper poets read. And it seemed like a birth of something. But then it all sort of fizzled out a little bit.

**LHP:** Yeah it didn't really go anywhere.

**LR:** [Bob Cobbing](#) also... He did something the same year. Now again Thea writes more about this but I think there were three different programmes which were commissioned, including Sono-Montage and the one with Bob Cobbing as well, you know the concrete poet? Who was such a key part of the counterculture. I can't remember what the other one was. So it's almost like they decided to do a finite number of programmes and then, you're right they just never continued beyond that really. But then again maybe Rosemary wasn't pushing to be involved any further, who knows?

**DT:** Actually maybe now would be a good time to have another poem. Lizzy's going to read a poem called Badly Chosen Lover which appears on the Sono-Montage programme.

**LHP:** Yes so this was the first poem of Rosemary's that I ever came across, and it's my favourite. I would urge anyone if they get the chance to go to the British Library and listen to her reading, listen to Sono-Montage and listen to her reading her own poems as normal as well. She had a really beautiful reading voice for her poetry. I don't think I'll do it justice, but here we go it's Badly Chosen Lover.

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

**[See: <http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/badly-chosen-lover/>]**

**[00:47:57]**

**DT:** Thank you. Yeah I think we might move on from talking about Sono-Montage now apart from to say to anybody who's interested in putting poetry not to music because that is not what the point of the project was but anyone that's looking to collaborate writers and musicians you should definitely check that out. It's very interesting. And now, well inevitably, with Rosemary we're going to talk about when she took herself off to Bournemouth. I feel like it's untrue now to say 'disappearance' because it wasn't really... It was only disappearance in certain peoples' eyes wasn't it?

**LR:** Yeah. I mean she had, you might have heard in the letter I mentioned, an eye op. She had terrible problems with her eyes and she had this eye operation that rendered her blind, or she had an operation afterwards, I can't remember exactly why. Again this is all in Neil's book, the real details of it. But she felt very... You know you were talking earlier Lizzy about her feeling alone, I think she felt very alone in this sense. And she and her husband, I don't know if they were still together at that stage... And it should be said, I'm going to bring a biographical element to the poems, but I think they were... You know I don't think they were particularly... He was away for long stretches of time because he still worked back in Africa.

So I think they both took lovers even though they stayed together for a long time. But he then left her. I think this is around the time that she had this blindness for a while, she was really in this very low ebb physically, really at a low ebb. And also she was always searching for something, maybe it goes back to that idea of an internal spirit or something, but her mother also died, died in the bath very unexpectedly. I think she'd had a very close but not

easy relationship with her mother. So that happened around the same time. I guess it's that thing isn't it? It's circumstantial, various things came together at a certain point. The other thing was that she had been looking into religion a lot, but she'd been looking a lot into eastern religion and then found that she could get no solace from that.

And again I think you pick that up in one of the letters that I read. And this is why she turned back to Christianity, to Judo-Christianity rather than... She was looking a lot at Sufi and Buddhism and things like that before then. And then she got very angry and felt that they weren't helping her in any way. She was feeling very low as I said and that's when she turned to Christianity. And I think it must have been around that time that she left London. And I think the reason she went to Bournemouth, and again Neil writes about this and my mother will be the one to talk about this because she knows the details much better and remembers it, that's where Gar had always been kind to her.

You know you pick it up from that letter that I read about seeing Gar's spirit or whatever. So she went down to see her and ended up just staying, it became a bit of a safe haven in a storm and she was physically very, very low as well as feeling battered by life in many directions. I guess it's that thing that perhaps comes back to that idea of Satan and being tempted and everything, you talk about the difficulty of being a poet in terms of those two sides. The ecstasy of it and yet at the same time just those levels of intensity, I think for her she just felt it was too dangerous in a kind of way.

**DT:** And from what I've read and heard about her it definitely seems as though she had quite an extreme personality, and in that I mean things seem in her life to be black or white and there didn't seem to be much middle ground for her. And I think people... I've had that experience myself with my own personality. If you have that, you know if only polar opposites exist in your life it leads to a lot of rejection to anything that exists in the middle ground. Often you don't reject the polar opposite things, those two things are fine and you can understand those perfectly well. Anything that lays on the middle ground, which maybe comes back to why she rejected so many poets, contemporary poets in the 60s, because she couldn't identify with how they could see and find any interest in the true realities of life.

And then I suppose it makes sense that if you have that kind of personality that it would exacerbate any emotional crisis that you have and would lead to... Also I think that kind of personality leads to people searching a lot in their life, and trying to fill gaps you know for whatever reason they may have come about. There's a lot of speculation as to where these gaps may have opened up in Rosemary's childhood with losing her parents and there being a lot of turmoil. But that's speculation, I don't think that's really important. The important thing is how she then came to try and deal with that feeling in her life and that sort of searching.

**LR:** And I think you're right in a sense that her reaction was an extreme one. Cut it out. But perhaps she felt that was the only way she could survive. And if one can imagine being blind and alone. Not just alone writing your poetry in a room but blind and feeling... You know it must have been very, very frightening in many ways. And I get the feeling she was frightened. And she's frightened by the idea of... She talked in that letter I read out, she talks about nice and nasty spirits. I do think she was very sensitive to atmospheres and

perhaps this felt like a place that she could be safe. I've got a little bit I could read here which I think might address it.

**DT:** Yes please.

**LR:** It was from a letter that I received from her in... I'm getting them all muddled up now. I think it was '91. Anyway, yes. Oh yes it starts... I've got the top of page two here. "See the great dangers in trying to take on board primitive black magic cultures and imagine you can get away unharmed yourself. The Hindu religion is death of course." So she really felt "those carved figures represent demons and if we Westerners think demons don't exist any Hindu priest or for that matter Buddhist will quickly disillusion you. They do all those peculiar things - rituals, meditation, chanting and all that, to ward off evil spirits and nobody gets up to all those ridiculous antics without good reason."

And then she says here "look what happened to John Lennon." Anyway at the bottom she says "I'm most sorry there was a poem of mine in any anthology at all. I withdrew all my poems which had been solicited for anthologies then to be published." And then she puts in brackets "John Wayne's The Listener Anthology published by Derwent May etcetera. So the book you have is doing something illegal and I could sue them for it. I dimly remember writing to some woman publishing group because..." basically I found one of her poems published in an anthology of women poets. And so I sent her this letter going "I've found one of your poems!" and this was the response.

I think she's put in brackets here I think someone called Joy Mellieu and "said No" with a capital N "to their request. I also said No," also with a capital N, "to a woman who had written an entire novel around one of my poems. It was brutal but I had to be consistent. I said No," capital N, "to an Arts Council grant to a film company that wanted to give me a stipend until 'I produced'. I also said No to my American and my English publishers. And then, as I was afraid I would be pursued for my latest manuscript, one hundred thousand words, first half of a novel, the size of War and Peace, six years work..." And this is in inverted commas... "I burnt it in the incinerator here in the garden. Well you don't do all that without excellent reasons!"

"Never mind the fame, I was burning many thousands of pounds. I burnt it together with all the copies and notes. I can tell you I meant business." That's it. That's what she says about that. And then she says "it was so nice of you to ask about my year. I've learnt some absolutely thrilling things." Well she's put in the brackets here, back to that bit about saying No, she said "I didn't like what I had written and thought it was harmful." So you can see how categorical that was.

**LHP:** She really meant it.

**LR:** She did.

**DT:** It's almost as if the writer in her had to die completely, wasn't it? It couldn't, she couldn't, exist in a dual role, she had to be this new version of herself.

**LR:** Though I guess as we said before look at all of this! The writer hadn't died, but she couldn't be that writer anymore could she? And you can see from the beginning of that letter that she felt, in some sense, spooked. Without wishing to say that in a trivial way, that she felt... That's why to turn to Christianity felt like a safe place for her.

**DT:** I wanted to talk a little bit about the media's reaction. And when I say media, because she's a poet that's mainly other poets and editors, as to why they were so shocked and why it was such an intrigue. I've been talking to poets and writers recently about how they view their own... If they go through any turmoil at any point with their own creativity, how they view it. And a lot of people talk about their creative paths being a straight train track, you know, and what's behind them is terrible and has been proven to be terrible but it's done, and they're hopefully moving away from it. And what lays ahead is almost certainly terrible, so it's not always a very pleasant experience.

But this sort of analogy I was using, the spur that leads you to destroy all of your work, that offshoot from the track, most people couldn't understand taking that route no matter how much they were sure they hated what came before and what would certainly come ahead of them, most people could not put themselves in that position. So do you think that's why the media, and I'm thinking especially Radio 4's Lost Voices programme, why there was so much intrigue around it? Because people just can't understand why somebody that talented would reject it completely. Because it doesn't seem a natural conclusion of the creative mind, to then destroy everything.

**LR:** David I'm not sure I would look at it like that because I think there is a long history of artists destroying their work. I mean [Michael Landy](#)'s the famous one but you know artists burning their paintings... But I think what I reckon, speaking as someone who's a researcher and passionately tries to bring to attention women artists that I feel have been overlooked, there's something in us that cannot resist a mystery. What happened to her? And I think, I wonder, and this is extrapolation on my part, that at the time when she disappeared people were less interested than in the last maybe ten years when they get a whiff of this interesting poet, female poet. And what happened?

They want to know, they want to bring, as we all do, they want to piece together what happened to her. And Neil Astley has done an amazing job on this part. But I don't know about the... I don't know, I think it's about rediscovering her and I think it's... I guess I'm not putting this very well but I think as a researcher I understand that detective impulse to try and find somebody. You know you might have come across one of her poems and go "this is an amazing piece of writing, how can I find out more about this person?" And then to find out that she decided to stop and withdraw, it's only going to make it that much more fascinating, isn't it? To find out more.

**DT:** I definitely understand the mystery side of it. But there's also part of the human condition that will deliberately point... I'm just trying to word this properly... The way that people, if they hear Rosemary or anyone destroyed their work, people say "oh that's a terrible shame, why did they do that?" Often it isn't considered a shame because future generations can't see the artwork. It's considered a shame for other reasons, you know, as if somebody is rejecting their gift. I'm just wondering about the element of guilt that may

have been laid on to Rosemary. She may not have been aware of it if she took herself away enough.

**LR:** She absolutely took herself out of it. I mean the only people she was really in contact with I think, well we can't know her relationship to neighbours and so on around her, but was her family. And even then by letter. You can imagine she remained a mysterious presence because we would get these letters and she diligently wrote them to my sister, my brother, my cousin Matthew and his two sisters every year. So that was quite a lot of writing to do in response perhaps to letters, and you can hear from her writing how generous and involved it is. So she was prepared to go that far but there's no way we would ever have met her. What am I saying in response to you? I guess what I'm saying is she... Well I guess what we were saying before. That she felt she had to cut that part of herself away, quarterised herself.

**DT:** I mean it's difficult to answer in terms of on Rosemary's behalf because what I was actually asking was more of a generalised point about creatives and how they can reject their work. I mean I personally can completely understand how it can happen but I'm just always amazed that more people don't see it as well.

**LR:** Do you think then David, and Lizzy as well, that it's something other writers and creative people can understand? It's more the people outside of that world who are perplexed by it?

**DT:** No that's what surprised me I think, I've found a lot of writers that are surprised, about the destruction of the work not so much the taking yourself away because I think that's easier to understand.

**LHP:** I mean I've certainly wanted to do that to everything I've ever written before, you know, yesterday. Even the other day I was thinking "shall I just burn everything else and start again?!" But you know I haven't actually done it so, I don't know really.

**LR:** What makes you want to do that? If that's not too personal to ask.

**LHP:** I don't know, just thinking it's terrible I suppose, and thinking "is that what I want my legacy to be?"

**DT:** Do you feel trapped by it?

**LHP:** A little bit. But then I always think "oh there's something else to be written" and then I don't really worry too much about it. I'd rather get on with writing something better, or trying to.

**LR:** Yes, you see this is where you're much more courageous than I am. I stepped... Took a sideways step. Write about other people and then you can always say "well I mean even if it's a terrible piece of writing at least perhaps it's giving more scholarship to blah blah blah." You know what I mean? But I'm married to a very fine painter and you know I know he lives through that the whole time. He has to be doing it, he says it's almost like if he's in the

process of painting then he's able to do it. It's when he stops and looks and looks back, it must be like a sense of vertigo in some strange way.

**LHP:** Yeah I think so. I think it was, was it Bukowski? I can't remember, who said that he never feels as good as while writing, but beforehand leading up to it he feels terrible, and afterwards he feels all horrible about it. It's like the best thing ever is while you're in the zone of doing it. But yeah I definitely understand feeling a bit suffocated by it and wanting to just get rid and start again really.

**DT:** That's sort of what I got a sense from reading and talking to you, Lucy, was that, and this is obviously just from my own head there's no basis and facts or anything, but Rosemary seemed to be trapped or stifled by the poet, Rosemary Tonks the poet, and needed to escape from that. And maybe the religious feelings and the feelings about family were just the consequence of... I've found a lot of creatives are running away or toward something and often it's the same thing.

Quite often it's just a loop you know? And they're trying to feel some sort of... They're searching for something and quite often in the process of making the art it temporarily fills the gap. But as soon as that piece is out of the way the gap reappears. And some people I think, those with more extreme personalities, get to the point where they completely reject that search and try and find solace, and hopefully she found comfort in whatever she was doing in Bournemouth. Hopefully she did find comfort in that.

**LR:** Well she found comfort I think... What I pick up on, because she mentions it a lot in all the letters on and off, reading the Bible. And I think in the bit I read it's there too, that she was just really enjoying it. But I get the feeling she's not reading the Bible as somebody who is necessarily a deeply religious believer in God, so much as she's fascinated by the construction of stories and language. And I guess the Bible's probably quite a good read. Even just the kind of archaic nature of the writing itself and the use of language I think would have absolutely... I get the feeling from the letters that she was absolutely fascinated by it. So I think she found fulfilment in that aspect of religion. But again I'm extrapolating.

**DT:** I just thought, and I'm going to completely misremember this quote, it's from the First World War and in the officers mess there was a young officer from a very well-to-do family, they couldn't get him to behave or carry out his work, he was always getting drunk. So they gave him a copy of the Bible to try and teach him a lesson. He came back and said it was the most wonderful, entertaining thing.

He'd never read so much bloodshed, you know because of the way the stories are constructed, and I think it would appeal to people in that way as well. And of course Rosemary hadn't properly disappeared, she was getting out and doing things and Neil Astley talks about how she was a regular at Speaker's Corner in London, in Hyde Park in London, which I find amazing because I spent several months sketching people at Speaker's Corner around 2005, so maybe she might have been there.

**LR:** Maybe she was there!

**LHP:** But then you burned all the drawings so you wouldn't know.

[Laughter.]

**LR:** It is fascinating how this sense of creative destruction, for her, was definitely a cleansing wasn't it? But she'd obviously felt so destabilised that I wonder... Also something that comes through in the poems and Lizzy I don't know if you picked this up but a sense of disgust or self shame in a way.

**LHP:** Yes, very much.

**LR:** And I wonder, I mean if this is something to ask on a podcast, if that's something that one feels that makes you want to destroy things, disgust at yourself. A kind of abjection in a way.

**LHP:** Yeah, self-loathing.

**DT:** Also it depends on your subject matter. If you're inclined to focus on the things that you dislike about yourself then that's only going to be heightened as well. I mean not only the sense that your writing's not as good as it could be or should be, you know the subject matter can eat away at you as well. It's tough, I write about really dark stuff and I have to push stuff aside because I would burn it. It's much harder now in the digital age, you write stuff on your iPad or your phone and then print it out and it exists in so many forms. You don't have a singular manuscript anymore.

**LR:** You can't stick a huge manuscript into the incinerator.

**LHP:** You'll have to kick your computer out of the window or something.

**LR:** Maybe it's just one always needs somebody there with you to go "oh I'll just take that before you burn it." Maybe that's the secret. But if you think about it so often, and again you know it does my head in because it's generally some male, great male poet, with some wife behind him who's probably writing poetry in a cupboard somewhere, they always were there to support. And it seems to be the poets or writers who've lived to a ripe old age with various anthologies coming out through that time, that there has been someone there to just keep their feet on the ground.

**LHP:** My dad is that person for me. He's hinted that he's secretly collecting all my poems together just in case I do something dramatic.

**LR:** Quite right too! I might just nab that one when we go!

**LHP:** Oh this is for you anyway.

**LR:** Oh good. So I will have a copy.

**DT:** Yeah that's an interesting point about Rosemary isn't it? That perhaps because of her age and being quite a strong, independent woman, that she didn't have the support network essentially that, like you were saying, that a man at that point would've had. You know this is hugely stereotypical but he probably would have had the wife at home like you said as an emotional support. Whereas Rosemary had...

**LR:** Well I think she had her husband, but he was often away. I mean I don't know enough about, again... There's various family conjecture about their marriage. I think he was quite supportive. But whether he was supportive of her as a poet, I have to go back and ask my mum about this and my aunt, or whether he was just supportive of her to have the role as wife or hostess I just don't know. And I wonder if she slightly, given he wasn't a poet himself or involved in that world, I wonder if she didn't have a slight double life as well.

I mean obviously she had soirees where there would have been other poets and writers and artists there. But it may well have been that some of the soirees were for her husband's business friends. So that probably could have, her sense of herself being so fragile anyway, that could have compounded it further perhaps.

**DT:** And was there any pressure on you and your family to speak out about Rosemary when she was still alive and there were so many stories being told about her?

**LR:** Well the pressure was... Well no-one was much interested, and she was, as you saw in that letter, categorical. "I meant business" she says, that we all knew. I used to mention her to friends, but then there was a sense of the crazy aunt Rosemary who was this amazing poet. We had some of her books. We had *The Bloater* and another children's book we've got at home, my parents house. But there really didn't have... We didn't have very much. But as my mother would say there wasn't an awful lot of interest in her as a poet so much of her almost as a personality in the family. It wasn't really until Neil was absolutely dogged about getting in touch with my aunt and my mother and saying "how can I get hold of her?"

And it's because my mother heard that programme about her being lost. And then she got in touch with Neil and said "actually she's living in Bournemouth!" And so that's how the relationship began between Neil and my mother and my Aunt Jill. And in a way I think both my mother and aunt were really trying to help Neil to try to tempt her out of her house, and even talking to the neighbour to the house, "can you slip this letter under the door?" No joke, you know. So it was really that which you know, also heard, that programme was I think very important for making people remember and be aware of her again. And so that was Neil obviously having long harboured a desire to find out what happened to her.

**DT:** Yeah I just wondered because I suppose people might start to think about, you know, if they were in your position or your mother's position or aunt's, it would be very easy to keep somebody secret. If a relation said "well I don't want to talk to anyone you know you can have my address now go away" but most of us won't have... Radio 4 won't be making programmes about those people. Because there were quite a lot of wild stories about where she might be and what she might be up to.

**LR:** We couldn't say she was in Bournemouth. Basically my mum and Jill told Neil where she was but she absolutely wanted to be left alone. So my mum knew that in a way in Rosemary would have been really furious. Well that was Satan wasn't it? So in a sense the reason that everybody kept it quiet was partly because there wasn't much interest, so it was easy to do, but also because she really didn't want us to, in her lifetime, tell people where she was. But you could see from that bit I read.

As a young woman writer I excitedly contact her about the anthology and that's the curtain that comes down, very nicely but quite clearly, so you knew you couldn't take it any further. You had to respect her wishes. But of course after she died we were able to celebrate her again. And in a way that, as I said before Lizzy, I know that she would be very, very pleased about that there are other... Of course as she said in the letter to me she might worry about you, but be delighted to think that her work is inspirational for younger generations.

**DT:** I think that's all we've got time for, and it's a really nice point to stop. But before we go we're going to have one final poem.

**LHP:** Okay. Yeah, just one more point I wanted to make actually was something again from the Peter Orr interview, something she was saying which I think was really nice about how important it is in writing for us to be living an interesting life, so she said I think poetry was life's inspiration. And she said in order to have your own idiom, I think she said, you need to be a grown up as well as being well read. And then you can cure your reading with your life. And also she said that poetry, she felt, could almost be more powerful than life in the end, if it works and it's done well.

**LR:** That's very interesting isn't it? You know that she says that it could be more powerful. But I think the thing is she felt that the power was too strong for her in the end. Didn't she?

**LHP:** Yeah. Anyway this is Bedouin of the London Evening.

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

**[01:18:34]**

**DT:** Thank you very much. And as I said the three recordings that we used for research for the podcast today are all available at the British Library and I'll put the reference numbers in the description for the podcast. The best thing you can do if you know more about Rosemary Tonks at the moment is to go and buy the Bedouin of the London Evening which is the collected poems of Rosemary Tonks available through Bloodaxe Books. There will be readings at the [Ledbury Poetry Festival](#) on the 11th of July. Will that be with Neil Astley?

**LR:** That's Neil Astley and I'll also be there talking a bit.

**DT:** And Lucy will be there as well. And hopefully we will be as well.

**LR:** Oh cool, great!

**DT:** Thank you very much Lucy, thank you very much Lizzy.

**LHP:** Thank you.

**LR:** Pleasure. Absolute pleasure.

**DT:** It was wonderful.

**End of transcript.**