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[Episode 13: The Bros’ Grim](#) – (March 2015)

Transcription by Christabel Smith – (22/06/2017)

Host: Lizzy Palmer – **LP**

Guest: Grim Chip – **GC**

Conversation:

LP: Hello, my name is Lizzy Palmer and this is a Lunar Poetry Podcasts Short. Today I am joined by my good friend Chip, aka The Bros Grim, and we are coming to you from the All Stars Boxing Gym on Harrow Road, hence the manly, energetic background noise you must be hearing.

GC: And womanly!

LP: Right, so, hi Chip.

GC: Hello, how are you doing?

LP: Good. How are you?

GC: I'm knackered actually, I've had a very tough morning training and coaching, and it's all good, it's all good.

LP: Well it'll be good for our listeners to know that even tough boxers like to talk about poetry sometimes too. So if it's all right with you, by way of a proper introduction, we'll start with a poem.

GC: OK. I'm going to do something that's relatively new, but I think will serve a purpose, and it's called

I Spy

Can't do semiotics, doesn't read the signs,
Not neuro-typical; not diagnosed,
Just one of those who have to
Live between the lines,
Penned in the margins,
Out in the cold, cold sweat,
Someone you dreamt of,
No-one you met.
Well versed in tradecraft,
Dead-letters dropped,
Has gone the distance,
Never been stopped at the border,
Under control,
Sleeping together,
Ratty and Mole.
Twice is coincidence,
Three times, a plot,
One is an accident,
Except that it's not that easy,
Behaviours are learned,
At deep extra cover an agent is turned.

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LP: Thank you. So, my first question is: why poetry?

GC: My first answer is: why not? Which is trite, and I've heard other people say it, but nowadays with shorter attention spans, something short, crafted, precise has got to work,

hasn't it? It should be more accessible. Second answer is: because I'm good at it. We all like to do things that we're good at and I need some sort of affirmation as much as the next person, if not more. I think it's something that I'm good at and I like doing it, the craft of it pleases me. The third reason I think is because there's a short distance from plot to plate. I'm not sure that I advise it, but you can be working on something over the weekend and then stick it up on Facebook or wander down to the Poetry Café on Tuesday, to Poetry Unplugged, and get it out there and see what people think of it.

There's no other artistic expression that I can think of that has that same kind of effect. I've fooled around with writing for the stage, and writing short stories, and that sort of stuff, and thought about writing novels, it just takes so long to get anything done. You can be doing stuff and nobody ever sees it. The thing about poems is once you've finished them, you can get them out there and do things with them.

LP: Yeah. So, speaking of getting it out there, how often do you read your poetry in public?

GC: Perhaps not as often as I should. Almost going back to the first question about 'why poetry', it's always seemed to me that poetry's always been somewhere around in my life, from a kid. My mum and dad somehow managed to get poetry into me. I've been in and around poetry for a long time. I met somebody through boxing about 15 years ago, a guy called Joe [sic - Jonathan] Asser – actually, the bloke who wrote the film that's been very well received, *Starred Up*. He was, is, a very good poet, he's concentrating on writing film scripts now, but I met him here, I was teaching and coaching in here and he was talking about doing poetry work. Although I'd known people who'd done light poetry back in the 1980s, who I'm in touch with again now, it had completely dropped off my radar. And he said, 'Oh, you should come along,' because I'd expressed interest, and I went along and I thought, well, I can do at least as well as that.

But I've never got out the loop; you know, it's not something that I do professionally, it's something that I do, it's part of my life, and a big part of it, and I want it to go well, but it's only one aspect of me and my life, so I don't do a lot of hustling around for work. So, to answer the question directly, I will go out and do gigs, I'll go out and do open mics, and that sort of stuff, but I don't do a lot of hustling for work. So I might do maybe a couple of dozen, 25, 30 live events in a year. If I'm invited to do a feature, I'll definitely go. If I've got some new stuff, I'll probably go down to Unplugged, 'cos I know Niall O'Sullivan quite well, know he's going to stick me on just to try out new stuff. Or if there's people that I know are gigging that I like, I'll go along to that. But I can't be bothered to just trail around the place looking for open mics and sweet-talking people. That's just not me.

LP: Have you had anything published?

GC: I get bits and pieces published in little magazines and stuff. It's interesting, going back to that question about how you get your poetry out there, I'm not sure just getting stuff published is the only way. As I say, I like doing live work, I think I'm good at it, but again, I've got into a habit now of, if I'm happy with a poem, sticking it up as a note on Facebook with an image of some kind. And occasionally, about once a year, my brother-in-

law, he's a visual artist, Mark Welland, he and I do some work, where we do a short film or we'll do some work incorporating visual stuff and get it out there.

Then there's the getting published thing. And I don't really submit work anywhere. The one place I will send stuff, I'm a big fan of *Rising*; I'm an old mate of Tim Wells from back in the day, I really like the whole ethic of that. But I've had poems published in *Pen Pusher*, *Counter Culture... South Bank Poetry*, which I like - they published three of my American poems [INAUDIBLE] which is good. I know Janice and Dónall down in Guildford did an anthology of poets that they'd had down there, and I put some stuff in for that. I know there's a *Until The Light Goes Out* anthology coming up. If I'm asked to do something, I'll let people have it, but I'm not going to send unsolicited stuff all over the place. I'm just not going to do it.

LP: Would you say you prefer the more direct expression then?

GC: At risk of making a pun at my own expense, I have a bit of an attitude towards it, a bit of a chip on my shoulder, about the page / stage stuff. I think there's a danger that if you're known as being good live, people take the attitude, 'well, it can't be all that much written down then.' Whereas I actually work really, really hard to make sure it works in both; really, really work at it and craft it, to make sure that it works on the page and on the stage. I don't think the two things are mutually exclusive. Too often... actually, I'm not going to say anything negative at all, I'm going to be positive, but too often, poetry's badly presented, or at least without much imagination.

To be fair, if I'm hoping that people are going to come out and spend their time and money listening to me dropping my poems, then the least I can do is to do something to put it over to them. By the same token, I know there are some people who are great live and the content isn't all that, there are some people who look great on paper, but live they're pretty dull. I don't see why that should be the case. I think everybody has it in them to write good stuff and to actually present it well.

LP: Great. Well we'll have another poem then, please.

GC: OK, let me do something that's... that first one wasn't entirely typical. I've got a bit of a reputation as a political poet, I can't think why. I just write stuff and sometimes it comes out political, but there is an election coming round the corner, and I'll do this because this is a bit of a signature piece, and it's kind of something that people would know me by. It's about the current coalition government, it's called;

A Class Act

It's the thin veneer that's so insulting,
As if we should be grateful
That they feel the need to lie, at all.
Decisions have been taken,
Still, they are consulting their 'key stakeholders',
The ones that fall between the quite unloved unlucky

And the unfortunate but undeserving poor.

They'll play no real part in the big debate:
Why do the 'haves' need so much more to motivate them,
Whilst the 'have-nots', apparently, need so much less? How
did we get ourselves into this sorry state?
And can we trust the ones who say
That they'll extract us from the mess?
There seems to me to be a fundamental, fatal, flaw,

A massive fault line in their master plan,
They want it both ways,
Want to get well In the good times and the bad,
They want you with your head down, working for the
man, They want to stop you spotting you've been
had.
Whilst those who want for
nothing? They want more.

So now we've government by clever knotting of the old school
tie, And they'll do very nicely thank you, out of boom and
bust,
So ask yourself, what does this signify?
Is it a nasty accident or a betrayal of trust?
The fact is, this is something that we've seen
before. This is a class act, that's what this is;
This is war.

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LP: Wonderful, thank you.

GC: I make myself laugh. I get quite into that.

LP: It's great!

GC: Focus, Chip, focus.

LP: My next question is about how you critique your own work, and whether or not you have any specific methods for doing that? I know you said already you don't purposely go out and seek out open mic audiences all that much, but do you look for feedback from audiences at all, or are there certain people you share your writing with?

GC: That's really interesting. I think this is the most difficult question. I don't, really. I'm an arrogant so-and-so. I am pretty certain that my rhyme is good. About 15 years ago I sort of started into this idea of The Bros Grim as a poetry project, as it were, it sounds a bit highfalutin, but I'm gonna write some poetry for a few years, see how that goes, and I think

I can present it well, I think I've got some things to say, but I never got into it in order to be liked, or published.

Like any writer, I'd quite like to have a slim volume, or a couple of slim volumes. I would, I think my work stands up. I think I've got some things to say, but I absolutely understand that I need to put more work in, really, but in terms of critiquing my stuff, there's people whose opinions I really respect. I've got some good friends in poetry and sometimes those people will give me some good feedback, but I don't really go looking for feedback. It's interesting. Everybody likes it, if somebody comes up to you and says, 'I really liked your stuff,' it really makes me happy and I'm pleased about it.

I like to engage people in conversation, but we were talking, before we turned the mic on, about what level of danger are you going to be in. Somebody I like asking me about poetry, we could be talking for hours and hours and hours. We've been talking around some set questions and to be fair, I think we've probably had better conversations, although those questions are good questions, I've been answering the questions and you've been asking them and we've had better conversations about poetry. In those conversations, I'll always say I don't really give a damn what people think about it, as long as I'm reasonably happy with it.

I'm my own harshest critic. Sometimes I do give this artistic 'that was just rubbish, Chip, rubbish.' But particularly if you're a feature, you should be working on, how does your set hang together? You should be rehearsing what you're going to say in between, linking the poems, all that sort of stuff, in order to make it work. It's interesting, my brother-in-law went down to look at some paintings in Eastbourne, and we were talking about two shows there, one was John Virtue and another very good guy whose name I can't remember, but both those shows had a theme and if you're doing a set, pulling poems out at random doesn't work for me. If you try and make it hang together as a whole, as you should do with collections...

But to answer the question, no, I don't really do that, although positive feedback is always welcome. And to be fair, on occasion, I've had some negative feedback. I think Niall O'Sullivan told me, I did a feature for him down at the Poetry Café, and he got a letter of complaint saying, 'We don't want this sort of stuff, it's really negative, it's the poetry of clenched fist.' And I said, 'Niall, have you got that letter? 'Cos I want to frame it!'

LP: Use it in your publicity?

GC: Absolutely. The other thing I'd say is, I think it's sometimes a bit difficult, because of the way I am on stage, for people to approach me. I don't think I'm the most approachable individual. I'm a lovely, cuddly bunny really, but sometimes I don't actually come across like that.

LP: Oh, we know that. On that note, how would you like to see your writing progress?

GC: It's a good question. I'm not altogether certain. As I say, if I'm at a gig and somebody comes up and says, 'I really like that, I've got a journal or magazine and could you send

some stuff?' I will, absolutely. I have spoken to publishers about having a pamphlet or a book and sent some stuff and to now, haven't really got a bite on that. And I don't really mind. I'm in it for the long run, the long run being one of my things. I'm not going to get disheartened or disillusioned with the work, it's just I can do it in a sustainable way.

If I'm doing a couple of gigs a month, that's great, if I'm getting a few things published here and there, that's great, if I get something large published, that's great too. You find the work that you're writing changes subtly over time. I'd just like to keep writing, keep being able to do gigs with good people, having good conversations with people. As I say, I do a little bit of work with my brother-in-law on mixing visual art and poetry and I've done a little bit of work in a studio with producers that I'm not entirely happy with, but if I had unlimited time and unlimited funds, I've got some ideas about bringing different visual art and some music and some words together.

That's not my primary focus. My primary focus is I'm a poet. That's what I do and if I can do some mixed-media work with people who I connect with, I would do that as well, but it's just getting the opportunity and time and the money to put it all together.

LP: Of course. So before we get onto our final two questions, can we have a third and final poem?

GC: Yeah, okay. This one's called;

Not Half-Empty. Drained.

The lives of others and the special demonstration unit
Come together for a money shot.
She moans, then he ejaculates.
When they call 'cut', that's all we've got.

Regardless of their lordships' verdict,
We know exactly when we're being screwed.
Some say we're stuck with it.
We're not. Just super-glued.

Lectures on revolution from some hairy lecher make us yawn,
Turn off, or back to 'Strictly', else to online porn.
Tune out the commentary on privilege,
On gender, race, on intersectionality,

'Til someone asks
'Whatever happened to the working class?'
Then sigh, bend over, hold your ankles, take it up...
With your MP.

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LP: Thank you.

GC: You've heard that poem before!

LP: I love it, it's my favourite.

GC: That false ending! I did a gig the other day and people just stared at me, and I thought, 'Oh no.' Never mind.

LP: What would you say have been the main influences over your development as a writer and performer?

GC: That is a really difficult question to answer without sounding like a complete prick, it really is. There's a long list of people. Honestly, that's almost impossible to answer. I've been around for a while, you know, and an awful lot of things have influenced me, not just poetry. Going back to when I was a kid, Mum and Dad feeding me a bit of Lewis Carroll, TS Eliot, a bit of Kipling.

As a young fella, listening to music, being into lyric-heavy songs. Obviously, I was a teenager when punk rock came on, that opened a whole lot of stuff up. Obviously, people like Johnny Clarke, that accessibility of it. But all kinds of people. The singer-songwriters, there's a line, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Billy Bragg, [Paul] Weller, [Elvis] Costello. That list has run out a little bit now. I listen to a lot of hip-hop, I go to a lot of theatre, I'm a big Shakespeare fan. Museums and galleries set me off on stuff. Reading the newspaper. Shouting at The Today Programme in the morning.

My oldest friend in poetry, I suppose, is Tim Wells, and he and I are often... young poets are coming and asking, 'Where do you get an idea? How do you work out what to write about?' It's like sitting on buses, sitting at the bar, listening to conversations, what people say, picking up on a phrase. I've got a poem and it starts, 'He dropped some banging tunes, yeah?' And that was a phrase I heard on a bus and it was like, I've got to put that in a poem! And it's a start to a good poem.

You just overhear things. Influences, like we were talking about, how black music has evolved from reggae toasting through into hip-hop, and, you know, Gil Scott-Heron, when I first heard Gil Scott-Heron or Linton Kwesi Johnson, people like that, that was a shock. I'm talking about in the 1970s. The same thing, but there are different ways of doing it. That happens across the piece. Already, I've dropped some names there, and I didn't mean to do that, but there's a whole lot of stuff out there.

LP: Yeah, obviously you've got quite a huge range of influences, so for the final question, what would you recommend to our listeners to go out and see, read or watch? It doesn't have to be poetry-related, just anything...

GC: OK, I'd recommend people get down to Eastbourne and have a look at this John Virtue exhibition of paintings, that's not too bad. I'm talking about Tim Wells again, he's doing a series of gigs around ranting poetry, the Stand Up and Spit series this summer. It

wouldn't be me talking about poetry if I didn't mention Helen Mort, who I think is the brightest prospect out there. Anything she's doing, including her blog, Poetry On The Brain, is worth having a listen to. I'd watch out for Ashley "Treasure" Theophane when he becomes World Champion Light Welterweight later this year. Shout out to Ashley!

Get out and experience things. Or just sit in your room and scribble. Just keep your eyes peeled for interesting stuff and try and be one of the people that's involved in it.

LP: Good advice. Well, thanks very much, Chip, that's it.

GC: Thank you.

LP: You've been listening to a Lunar Poetry Podcasts Short, and thanks very much.

End of transcript.