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[Episode 108: Susannah Dickey](#) (16/11/2017)

Transcribed by David Turner (16/11/2017)

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Susannah Dickey – **SD**

Intro:

DT: Hello. This is Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. How are you lot? I feel like I've had months off, but there hasn't been too much of a break in putting episodes out. I have actually had two or three months off. I feel really rusty and I don't really know what I'm

supposed to say. Except this is episode 108, all the numbers after 100 in this context seem bizarre to me but here we are.

I don't think I have any specific, other than, unfortunately the Arts Council application I put together for funding for next year was rejected, but I'm working on some things. You know, I might find some money somewhere else.

Today's episode is with a fantastic young writer, Susannah Dickey, originally from Belfast now living in south-east London studying an MA at Goldsmiths. You may recognise her name as I read one of her poems on the recent 'National Poetry Day 2017' episode. I've been really looking forward to chatting to Susannah for a couple of months really, probably longer than that, I have no recollection of time.

As I said I'm a bit rusty with these intros, all I've got is a list of bullet points. We talk about; The Tangerine Magazine, her MA at Goldsmiths, me really missing south-east London, prose poetry. We both write in a similar style and we chat a bit about, you know, when it's necessary to maybe give the reader a bit of a break, when you're banging on with your poetry. We also talk about Mumsnet which I still [and] I haven't googled it but I still don't believe it exists. And choosing titles for poems which is a horrendous thing to do but I think Susannah does it really well.

As always if you want to find out more about the series go over to www.lunarpodcasts.com where you can also download a transcript of this episode. Check us out at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook and Instagram, you know, where all the cool kids are and @Silen_Tongue on Twitter.

If you like what we do please support us by telling everyone you meet, literally, everyone you meet. Bus drivers, postmen, I don't think there are milkmen anymore, are there? Whatever you do, don't tell DPD couriers, they are a horrible company, anyone who has had to wait in for what seems like a fortnight for a parcel which they don't deliver or throw over a fence will know that they don't deserve to listen this program. Tell them about 'My Dad Wrote A Porno' or something.

Ah, one bit of news. This week I have signed the acquisitions form which means we have officially started to archive the entire series and all transcripts with the British Library which I'm really excited about. Over at the website is a blog which I'm trying to be better at keeping, where you can read some of my thoughts about why I think it's important to archive the series and poetry in general. Also some of the questions around the process and things that I've learned along the way. Life is nothing about sharing, right?

I feel like I'm going to really kick myself when I realise that I've forgotten to add loads of stuff to this intro, but who cares? It's just a podcast, right? Thanks for listening. Here's Susie.

Conversation:

SD:

We are not nearly as sad as we think we ought to be

- after 'Echo of a Scream' by David Alfaro Siqueiros

and say there were eighteen accountants sitting at nineteen calculators
and say we were standing in a glass box suspended over the factory
floor. We might watch their fingers endlessly key in different sums until they find
one that satisfies. 'What-' you might say, 'that's not how it works' and I might say,
'Forget it, it's just a metaphor. Open brackets - in the way that everything wrong is a
metaphor - closed brackets' and we might watch their hands pixelate before our
eyes

and say outside the air is loud and persistent. It coats your skin like factor
50 sun block; like pollution; like some unsightly dermatological condition. Ringworm.
Impetigo. We scratch but never get any closer to the lowest
layer of ourselves and we like to say that maybe that's no bad thing

and say the ground has been remade with coat hangers; thin and silver
ones; the ones that would always come pre-hung with flaccid dry cleaning. My
mother would bend them and drop them to the floor
and an obvious thought might be some grisly backstreet procedure
we were once warned about. A second obvious thought might be something like
gratitude. Those calligraphy-thin coat hangers would spring back and split the white
membrane of shopping bags and there would always be something that needed
cleaning up

and say we picked our way over the new paperclip terrain. You might say
'I'm glad you're here' and I might say 'But where else would I be?' and of course the
answer is a thousand other places but in tonight's production the role of 'My
Choices' will be played by 'My Lucky Breaks' and I'm silently grateful

and say outside there is a thick baby. Say next to it is another, smaller,
similar baby. Say they are both screaming. You might feel some sense
of duty. You might give me cause to scream too, to scream at you. I might scream
'Why do you refuse to let me make us both happy?' and you might not have a
response to this. There isn't any baby, of course. Not really. But there could be

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DT: Thank you very much Susie.

SD: That's okay.

DT: Thanks for joining us.

SD: This is lovely.

DT: I feel like we're breaking the rules because you're having a chat in the library but they have stuck us in the poetry corner which should mean that no one will come down here.

SD: We can smoke, we can drink Dr. Pepper.

DT: I think maybe we should start, if you wouldn't mind, just giving the briefest of introductions to yourself and your writing.

SD: I'm originally from Belfast in Northern Ireland, I've been writing for I guess about two or three years and I'm currently doing my MA in creative writing at Goldsmiths [University]. This is like being on Blind Date.

DT: "Will you choose poet number two?". I was just about to say that we first met in Belfast but that's a lie because we met in Birmingham at Verve Poetry Festival for which you had won the poetry competition.

SD: Yeah, that was a hoot.

DT: Any chance I get to plug Verve Poetry Festival, I will jump at because it's a fantastic thing.

SD: Yes, they're great.

DT: Actually the reason I probably mention it is because the Verve competition opened recently so if people want to check it out I'll try and... I constantly say I will post links in the description and I never do but I will endeavour to do it.

SD: I've sent in my 60 haikus about cities!

DT: But we did meet up when I was in Belfast this summer, with Lizzy [Turner] and we attended the fantastic Belfast Book Festival and you were reading as part of The Tangerine Magazine... Was it their issue two launch?

SD: They were doing a collaboration with two other Irish writing journals. With Banshee and Stinging Fly so they had this whole, kinda, magazine bachanalialia.

DT: Those things aside which I'm sure people aren't that interested in. But I feel a pressure, having not done any training in broadcasting to explain why I've chosen people for podcasts. It should just be enough that I've [invited them].

SD: You should get, like they have on radio, the pre-programmed sounds? You could just have one that says 'CONTEXT!' and then you wouldn't have to say anything.

DT: Well, I did think about buying a button that said 'segue' to get out of awkward moments. I could probably do with it now. I think we'll start talking about your MA because it's fresh for you and you're doing your MA in New Cross and I really miss south-east London so let's talk about that. Oh, this is the first interview that I'm recording having moved to Bristol so I'm going to deliberately talk about south-east London for the whole program.

I think a lot of listeners won't know how a creative writing MA works, so maybe if we start talking about the structure of it and then we can discuss a bit more about how it has maybe influenced your writing? I know it's quite fresh and not much has happened but let's start there.

SD: I think Goldsmiths is maybe slightly different to some [institutions]. So, because the title is 'Creative and Life Writing' there's a real looseness in terms of what genre you have to write in. You can really just do whatever you feel like which appeals to me because, you know, when the 'poetry tap' turns off you just want to write eight paragraphs about your relationship with your dead grandfather or whatever.

I have one day of class a week and that's... I have a workshop in the morning where there's ten of us and we all sit and bum each other up and talk about how wonderful we all are. How we're the greatest thing since Tony Morrison. So, we do that for an hour and a half which is really lovely and some people are writing fiction, some people are writing prose, some people are writing memoirs and some poetry. So you get that really nice cross genre exposure which I like.

And then in the afternoon we have visiting writers who come and speak for about an hour or so. So we've had Claire Keegan, next we we're seeing Daljit Nagra which is really exciting and then we have another lecture in the evening where a contemporary writer comes in and plugs their book and does a Q&A.

DT: Is there a set goal for the course or are you pretty free to work within this year?

SD: You're pretty [but] there are assignments so you are expected to produce quite a large body of work but what that work is is really entirely up to you, which I like. I think some other MAs are quite prescriptive, you have to lay it down what you're going to do and you have to stick to that. Whereas Goldsmiths is very much, "do what you feel like".

DT: What were you hoping for when you signed up for an MA.

SD: I mean, the major advantage is just you're being exposed to a lot of work that you might not have had an awareness of or the kind of clout to go and seek out yourself. So I'm reading a lot of stuff that I was too stupid to read before which is a really great thing. Also, I think, I'm someone who needs to be around other people writing so that I can really get that, quite strong, sense of crippling inadequacy that makes me want to write.

I think Seamus Heaney in one of his memoirs talks about finding your poetic voice and it's when you find in someone else, when they've written something that makes you think, "ah I wish I'd written that in that particular way". I think the advantage of doing something like an

MA is you're being exposed to writers that help you go further on into finding new ways of crafting your own voice which I really like.

DT: And do you see your own writing as being naturally at home in that academic setting as well? Did that add to it or is it purely about being around other people who are dedicating this much time to writing?

SD: I think it's a bit of both. I think Goldsmiths especially because you can have that cross-genre thing. Because I write a lot of prose poetry it's helpful almost to be reading a lot of novels alongside poetry because that informs my writing a huge amount. It's both the kind of motivation to actually do stuff and the fact that you are getting steady feedback on your own work because I have no idea when what I've written is shit or not. I really need someone to tell me and I'm desperate for people to tell me.

DT: As I do with all my preparation for interviews, I desperately flick through the pamphlets and collections of people I'm just about to meet in the following 20 minutes. I really like to write prose form [poetry] and I think I'm getting to the stage where I'm trying to question what form the writing might take. Rather than just blocks of text which I'm sort of drawn to and I would happily just have stuff in blocks of text, though I know it can confuse people sometimes in terms of what you're trying to get across.

DT: I really like your pamphlet for it but I couldn't quite work out what you were trying to do with form of the prose you were writing and the breaks in the sentences. Would you mind trying to explain a little bit about the thinking, if there is any at this point, why certain poems take those structures and why you wouldn't just have a block of prose?

SD: I wouldn't say that it's an exact science. I guess I would start writing and then I would just... If it's a very strong narrative I would put in breaks where I felt there was a natural break in the narrative and maybe just to give whoever is reading it a rest. I don't want to whack them over the head with a tombstone of words! In the last one, the plywood one, it's a very kind of fragmented... I mean, there is a kind of I would say a consistent narrative thread through it but at the same time it jumps about a lot. There's a lot of lateral thinking going on, I guess I tried to have the breaks respond to that when there was maybe a slight digression.

DT: I definitely picked up on that sense that there would be a break into a tangent. It's quite a natural rambling story telling method, isn't it?

SD: Yeah.

DT: Someone that has got too many points to make?

SD: Yeah but I think that's just me.

DT: It's something I recognise definitely from Sunday drinking in London pubs and it probably exists quite a lot in Belfast too I should imagine with people linking too many stories together. But I like the way that you start to question whether all of the story has

actually happened or whether you're elaborating to prove a point or reinforce a point and whether the tangents are... That's what I was trying to get to, how much are the tangents digressions a protective wall for you? How much are you hiding behind the digressions?

SD: I guess the poems I would enjoy the most... A poem like Jeffrey McDaniel's 'The Quiet World' where you have this very absurd narrative and it is funny and is strange and there's a it with him pointing at soup on a menu to order it. But ultimately at its core there it's very strong, it's very straight talking in its feeling that is then wrapped in this more absurd story. I respond to that a lot in poems I read, like the work of Maxine Chernoff which deals with that in a really effective.

I guess the first poem I read that really made me think, "shit, yeah I like that, I would like to be an active participant in this", was 'The Colonel' by Carolyn Forché [in which] you have this really amazing turn about halfway through it where he tips a bag of ears onto the table and it's horrifying and it's weird and it's dark but beyond that it is truthful and it's honest. I guess I like writing poetry because I'm a person who has a very large and very tedious amount of feelings was that I wouldn't want to inflict on anyone in their purest form.

DT: I probably didn't ask that question quite correctly. This idea of protection and maybe a protective barrier isn't just for yourself.

SD: Absolutely, it's also for the people that have to listen to me!

DT: I think maybe this is why I'm questioning my own writing in terms of... You made the point really well about not wanting to hit people over the head with a tombstone of words because perhaps you do need that relief. It's perhaps easier to make stronger points at times if you allow some relief in the story?

SD: I think if I unleashed them without any sort of muffler, I think people would either have me spayed or euthanised, so I think it's quite beneficial for everyone that I have these slightly stranger narratives to wrap the feelings up in. Like cheese around a pill you give a dog, you know, you can just think of my writing as a pill wrapped in cheese.

DT: We'll all make sure we race off now to release a collection with that phrase as its title before you get there. These questions around the form and the prose and the narrative aspects of your writing and the cross-overs that you're now experiencing and enjoying so much at Goldsmiths, can you see your writing or your poetry developing in that direction? Or do you feel that there will be a break into prose writing?

SD: Well, I'm actually having a go at prose at the minute, I mean, it's terrible because I'm bad at pacing. The good thing about poetry is you don't need to be good at pacing. So all of my attempts at prose...

DT: Wrapping it up in the first chapter?

SD: Exactly! I'm going to write a one chapter novel and everything is going to happen the world is going to end and everyone's going to get tetanus and also there's a unicorn. That's

going to be my novel and it's going to be garbage! The prose I've always like the most, I guess, with hindsight are ones that have poetry in them. We did 'The Wide Sargasso Sea' at school and it's pure poetry, especially towards the end when her kind of thought process is getting more fragmented. You can really see the similarities between that book and the work of someone like Warsan Shire.

SD: And 'N.W.' by Zadie Smith she does this really experimental thing with form and it's almost as if there are just little prose poems shoved all the way through. Even someone like Phillip Roth, occasionally... in 'American Pastoral' he's got this chunk all about this boy making a coat made of Guinea pigs for his girlfriend and it reads like a Russel Edson poem, it's brilliant.

So, I think maybe the prose I like the most has poetic elements to it in the way that the poetry I like the most has prose elements to it. So, hopefully over the course of this year if I ever learn a damn thing about pacing maybe I'll successfully write some fiction.

DT: This is unfair to spring this question on you because it's a horrible question...

SD: Is it about my relationship with my father? Which is good by the way!

DT: No! I finish with that question, we're only halfway through. I was going to ask you, if you can, to just give a brief explanation as to what prose poetry is. How it differs from fiction or flash fiction?

SD: I guess I could be really lazy and borrow someone else's idea of what prose poetry is but there's a really amazing book called 'The Tradition of Subversion', by Gail Green that's all about prose poems. It talks about the prose poem is different from the novel in that it rejects long descriptions, it rejects plot, it rejects character development and all that's left is narrative. That's what a prose poem is, it's a chunk of narrative with poetic language woven through it.

I think it's a really interesting form especially the way it allows you to have an onslaught of images, kind of, one on top of the other, you can have these really long lines. Like the poem, 'Hating Men' by Sarah Peters that I was introduced to recently. There's this line where she's talking about all these men in the river outside her house and she just lists all the different things they're wearing and it's like eight different articles of clothing and it's completely brilliant. But you couldn't really have that in any other poetic form because it would take up nine lines and the reader would get bored. So, it's this really intense chunk of narrative storytelling with poetry woven through it and I'm a big fan of the prose poem form.

DT: I think now would be a good time to take a second reading.

SD: Yeah the first poem I read and the second poem are both in issue 230 of Ambit [Magazine] which was published a few weeks ago. Just to completely shit on the prose poem vibe, this is not a prose poem but it is short so, yay! And it's called;

I have a reason for asking but I'd rather not share

A beloved and famous horse
was found shot. Its legs
were stiff and pointed
at the sky and in the grainy
photos in the local paper
it resembled a toast rack.
It was buried in a hollowed
out grand piano; the only
thing large enough
to accommodate its body.
The body of the piano,
the shape of a sock puppet
in use, was lined with fur.
A small girl - I don't know
who she belonged to – tugged
my arm and said 'Will he
still get to race in heaven?'
and I said, because it was
raining, 'Horses don't go
to heaven. What are you -
stupid?'

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DT: Thank you very much. So, your father? I really love when, unplanned, people read stuff that completely contradicts what we've just been talking about is the perfect format for any conversation. I think now would be a good time to discuss the pamphlet, this is your debut pamphlet, isn't it? We're now going to point at an object which no one can see.

SD: I'll just rub it over the microphone.

DT: Yes, say hello to the pamphlet. This was put out through The Lifeboat Press, which is a fantastic new-ish press from Belfast.

SD: Yeah, the pamphlets are fairly recent, I think the first one they did was Pádraig Regan's in 2015, but prior to that they've been around for a while doing readings where they pair an emerging poet with an established poet.

DT: That's Stephen Connolly and...

SD: And Manuela Moser.

DT: I really recommend that people go and check them out, they've got a really nice link where you can buy all three pamphlets in one go, they're really cheap and they'll post them to you. How did your relationship start with The Lifeboat?

SD: There's a really nice poetry scene for young poets in Belfast at the minute, a lot of whom come out of Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's [University] but it's really kind of warm and nurturing and they're really nice to you if you're shit but they're also equally nice too if you're very very good, which I think is a nice balance. I read at an open-mic event at Queen's called, Poetry and Pints that I first read at in September, 2016.

A few people were there and they liked the stuff and spoke about it very favourably and Stephen got in touch and said, "oh you should you should send us some stuff and we'll organise a reading for you at some point". So I sent them some stuff and then there was a bit of a hiatus because it was quite difficult to find an established poet who was available for a reading and then some time passed and it came around to March/April time and we were talking about it again. They said, "well actually what about instead of a reading we put out a pamphlet, would you be interested?" At which point I ate my own hands with excitement, "yes of course I'd be fucking interested, you beautiful people!"

DT: "I'm sorry but I've got integrity, I'm going to walk away at this point. Where's my open-mic slot?"

SD: So, I sent them a large chunk of work and they very patiently sifted through all the nonsense and found some stuff that they liked and we went from there. It was a really wonderful experience, they're really great editors, I feel like my poems improved by about 400 to 500 percent through their input.

DT: What sort of timescale did the pamphlet take to put together?

SD: We first spoke about it at either the end of March, beginning of April and then it came out in June.

DT: So a really quick turnaround.

SD: Yeah, they're really efficient and quick and we had a few very intense meetings where we went through the poems and we decided what was going in and we fixed them and we discussed the running order.

DT: I suppose that's the great thing about prose poetry isn't it, you've only got to format five poems.

SD: That's it, it was dead easy because they're all so bloody long! It took no time. Actually, the title came last, they were kind of pestering me.

DT: I don't know if we've mentioned the title yet?

SD: We haven't mentioned that! So it's called, 'I Had Some Very Slight Concerns' and that, kind of, came in very late. Titles always come really late to me, they're kind of the last thing I come up with once the poem's written. Actually, I got the inspiration for the title off

Mumsnet, I don't know if you spend much time on Mumsnet? I spend far too much time on Mumsnet.

DT: It sort of occupies the same space in my head that the Daily Mash does, but it's a real thing, isn't it?

SD: Yeah, it's a real thing. It's amazing! I wound up completely trapped one day in this really long thread which was just women trying to diagnose their perfectly healthy children with various social disorders and it was amazing. They'd post comments like, "oh, I'm really worried about my son. He gets very upset when we take his favourite toy away from them and try to have dinner." and I felt like saying, "you're describing every child ever". You're describing me! It was just this word 'concerns' that came up again and again and I just felt that this, kind of, lower level neuroticism is me.

DT: Have you seen the new sitcom on BBC Two, 'Motherland'? The pilot and the first episode on BBC iPlayer and it's written by Sharon Horgan Holly Walsh, Graham Linehan and I feel terrible now because I can't remember his wife's name but she's a writer on it as well. It's about what it is to be a mother but a lot of the other characters in it are the, in inverted commas, perfect mums. Who basically are 'perfect mums' because they're just constantly terrified about their own performance and this constant anxiety and this attempt to be better.

You're somehow better by being more concerned and there's this competition to see who's got the sickest kid, who's done most to Google what might be wrong with them. You should check it out because it's hilarious. I actually wanted to talk to you about the titles of your poems because it seems like there's a very conscious decision in the title selection but again, like the form, I couldn't quite work out what [you're doing]. There are definitely connections and I don't mean they feel disjointed from the poetry but I couldn't quite work out what the process was in terms of how these titles come about.

I think, quite often, the titles seem a bit non-intuitive once you've actually looked at the poem. I don't really know how to explain it except that either what will happen is the poem will come about because I'll be feeling disgruntled about some fairly nebulous social issue and then this sort of strange scenario will come by as a result of that. Then I'll try to keep the title very literal in the sense of the way I was feeling that the then strangeness of the poem came from. Or I'll have written the poem and I'll just kind of follow various trains of thought until I feel like I have a statement that, at the very least makes sense to me within the context.

DT: You having just said that, it may be the matter of factness of the titles that grates against the ambiguity of some of the points and the tangents and the digressions. It seems that there is a very firm starting point which you then run away from quite quickly. But it works really well, I really enjoy it.

SD: I love titles. I'm a big fan of titles and I almost feel like if the title maybe has a few steps of distance from the content it can make it more interesting. Because it encourages you to maybe read the poem in a different way and maybe think, "how is this interacting?".

DT: You view the title as a starting point to the poem?

SD: Usually, yeah. Sometimes the title comes second but normally the bare feeling is there and then I'll phrase it.

DT: But perhaps not so much for you, particularly, but for the reader. It's not just a title for title's sake.

SD: Absolutely, I don't like titles for title's sake.

DT: How, if any way, has your view on your own writing changed since the pamphlet came out? Since this is your debut and you've seen your work printed in a collection on its own, has your view on your writing changed in terms of how you want it shaped and formed and packaged?

SD: I think on the basis of the pamphlet... On the ones that I'm still... I'm sure this is a problem for everyone which is, a few months after having written something you can't stand it. But with the pamphlet there's still a few in there that I think of really quite fondly and I'll, kind of, look at them and think, "well, what is it that I think is good about this? What is it that I think is working? What is it that I think is the closest to what I'm eventually trying to do?" then I'll try and use that to inform new work.

DT: Obviously, a lot of people are going to continue to come to your work for the first time through this pamphlet, so how do you reconcile that sort of appreciation in that people might really love your work though it may seem tired and old to you because it's been in your head for so long?

SD: I think you have come at it thinking, you know, well I hate almost everything I do. I'm a very inward-looking, self-indulgent, self-loathing person.

DT: You're a poet, Susie.

SD: I'm not sure about that, I think there should be another title for me. Yeah, I think you have to appreciate that a lot of people are very nice and aren't coming to your work with the feeling that, "you suck, you suck, everything you do sucks, you'll always suck, you'll never be any good at anything", because you know people are generally quite nice. It's really nice to, kind of, have someone say, "I really enjoyed your pamphlet" because you know it makes you think... Obviously, validation from outside doesn't really matter, but also if you're not getting any validation from inside, sometimes it's quite nice.

DT: One thing I like to do during this series is to get people to talk more about how important validation is, not because of ego massaging but it is... You've hit on something very important there. It can often be a very destructive process, creativity because [some] people are going through this process and end up really hating what they've produced or disliking themselves because it's you're really setting yourself up for failure a lot of the time.

I often say to people that the first two words you put in a poem are just the start of a journey to failure. So, this reassurance from other people is really necessary and it's about finding the balance isn't it between that not going to your head but keeping you buoyant above the tide of your own, what did you say earlier, crippling inadequacy. But is that a big motivation for you in your creative process?

SD: I would be quite prolific, I would write quite a lot but then a lot of that is bad. But when people talk about whether poetry is important, I think poetry is probably the most important for the person writing it, it's hugely important for me and I find it a very productive use for all my negativity which has been good. You know, when something gets published it's a really wonderful feeling not just because someone else likes the stuff but it does help you improve as a writer and it helps you identify what elements of your work are good and what aren't working so well.

Nobody is going to say that improvement is a bad thing. It's not the most important thing to be published because, again it's the act of writing and what that gives you but it's really lovely to feel like you're getting closer to that stage of producing the kind of material but you really respond to. Because while you like to feel like your work is saying what you want it to it's also a really nice thought that someone else might be responding to similarly in the way that you respond to other's work. I do think that validation for validation's sake is maybe not so important but validation for your own development is a very good thing, I think.

DT: It's a very personal aspect of what might be considered my practice as a writer or broadcaster but questioning the process is a very big thing for me. This is one question that I haven't quite articulated properly yet and I'm not going to do so now but I'm still going to throw it out because this process is helping me get closer to even asking these questions let alone answering them.

SD: Is it, boxers or briefs? Because... briefs, always briefs!

DT: That's better than my question. If take as a starting point that's fairly commonly held that poetry's an act of communication.

SD: Yeah.

DT: Firstly, why are we making it so difficult for ourselves to communicate with people? And if it is an act of communication, what are we trying to communicate? Because it's not the most efficient way of communicating with people because I think this ties in quite a lot with this idea of validation. If you're looking to link up with people or to communicate or to bond with them in some way, we're not making it very easy on ourselves, are we? What is it... Not, specifically what you're trying to communicate through your particular poems but as a writer or an artist are you, what kind of connection are you looking for?

SD: Gosh. I guess I wouldn't dream of ever just going to someone and just splurging all my feelings at them, one because I don't think it would be terribly helpful for anyone because they would just have to listen to all my nonsense. And the specificities of my

nonsense wouldn't be anything that they, maybe, would be able to empathise with or be able to say anything that might be especially helpful.

Whereas, I think the act of writing a poem can be helpful both to yourself in terms of, how you come at it, what approach you might take. How you put it into words, how it helps you engage with your own thoughts. Also, when you have that level of distance and that dislodging that a poem can do to a very specific problem by supplanting it into this kind of otherness, I think that can mean the other person can then respond to it because it has become slightly more abstract. It does become something more generalised and something that people can then more easily find themselves in.

DT: Yeah, I would agree with that.

SD: Sorry, it's like the world's worst Ted Talk, "Feelings. Do you have them?", don't.

DT: "Press 'a' for yes. Press 'b' for all the feels". I think that's a really good point to wrap up. We're going to finish with a reading.

SD: Yeah, a real gushy one! So, this poem is the last poem in the pamphlet which was published by The Lifeboat in June, 2017 and prior to that in the second edition of The Tangerine which came out in May, 2017. And this poem is called;

'Plywood is the liberation of wood.' Frank Lloyd Wright, in conjunction with the United States Plywood Corporation.

and did you ever hear the story about the man who threw himself in front of the pram to save it from an oncoming car?

and of course, I wondered at the time, my thoughts still glued together like strips of wood to make plywood, why not just move the pram?

He died. The baby lived. The baby was just a ball of soft velvet and its mind single-layered like tissue paper; press its skin and it takes a second to fill out again.

The idea behind plywood is that lots of layers of thin wood might be stronger. Immanuel Nobel came up with the process and it is named *déroulage* and have you ever considered that

Immanuel is a plywood name? Its etymology traced back to three parts in Hebrew, three murmurings, three layers, *im-nu-El*. Isaiah 8:8, 'Devise a plan and it will be thwarted.'

The Holy Trinity is a plywood idea, but what would happen if each decided to pursue its own interests? The Father rolling sushi, the Son training a horse to dance, the Holy Ghost hovering over a cliff with a Go-Pro. The people wouldn't like it. The people like their deities to come in £29.99 box sets. Better together.

My mind is held together with all the slim-fit bit ideas we acquire growing up: community-religion-employment and going for coffee with that person I've never really liked and needing to step outside at a party to mouth 'help' because the conversation is pressing, pressing me down like sand upon sand upon sand. My thoughts are the slats of assembled flatpack furniture or a seven-layer salad or a Jenga game someone pours glue over to render it useless, un-topple-able: a sticky Jericho. If someone came at it with a very large forklift perhaps they could tip it on its axis and make it capsize like a tired elephant

but with you it was more like

I was wine, capsizing

and I'm not sure if that's right, or if it's what happened but it feels like all the acid has been drained from me – you squeeze me tight till your fingers bleed and you put me to your lips and drink and

Meniscus: another plywood word. Peel it apart like wet smoked salmon and be left with torn strips of fibrocartilage, a dip in the surface of a lake that people can't stop tripping over, an eye that sits wrongly in its socket.

But anyway, there was that other story, about the woman who met the man and had her thoughts separated like six baby-skinned segments of orange, her diaphragm pressed onto a manual juicer

and she was new to this, and she couldn't have known what it was until she met him, and I suppose if you take the analogy one step further plywood could liberate wood only if oppressive layers of community-religion-nuclear family might liberate two people from being together. Liberated from each other, liberated from some dystopian system that decides people in love must submit to being flayed, ironed, varnished. So they stay apart, layers and worlds apart, and it doesn't feel anything like liberation

and maybe the man from the first story had always felt compressed and lonely and had unknowingly always wanted a child and even if they both lived the child still wouldn't be his. Isn't it better that he died ensuring the child's safety rather than go back to feeling compressed, lonely, always knowing that what he felt in that moment was huge and consuming and more like being peeled apart than being run over and over and over?

And I look it up and find *déroulage* translates to mean 'unwinding' and I turn over to see you in bed next to me, all my old, useless layers in little splintered heaps of sawdust on the floor for you have unwound me, and I am weaker now, like stripped bark, but stronger now, because you hold me up

and if plywood is liberation, love is the opposite. It's learning how to be alone sometimes and it's letting the impossibly black and silent night air roll between your parted fingers and it's knowing that I would willingly stop existing if it meant you would always be okay

©Susannah Dickey, *I had some very slight concerns*, The Lifeboat 2017

DT: Went on a bit, didn't it? Thank you very much, I love that poem. I used to make plywood but we'll talk about that off air.

SD: Did you? It's having a moment. There's a plywood exhibition at the V&A.

DT: Yes, so the main British company that is part of that exhibition, I worked for them. Anyone that likes modernist plywood furniture should check out the plywood exhibition at the V&A and Isokon Plus who I used to work for and who are part of that.

SD: It's a real fashionable wood.

DT: Yeah, but of course I loved all the other elements that didn't include plywood as well.

SD: "I'm just here for the plywood. All the other stuff? I can take it or leave it".

DT: I'll take you up on the technical aspects afterward, not really. The links to Susie's online presence will definitely be in the description, I promise we won't go into those now. Thank you so much Susie for coming to Bristol for a chat, I've been looking forward to this for months.

SD: Thank you for having me.

DT: Please do go and buy Susie's pamphlet and get whatever else The Lifeboat have got on their website because they're really good. I've got everything they've put out so far and they're fantastic. Definitely check out The Tangerine Magazine, those that listened to the episode that came from the Belfast Book Festival will have already heard the editorial team talking about it, Padraig, Tara and Kaitlyn chatting about the magazine. From Belfast Central Library we'll say good bye. Thank you, Susie.

SD: You said Belfast!

DT: Bye!

SD: Bye.

End of transcript.

