



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Please note, [Lunar Poetry Podcasts](#) is produced as 'audio content' and is intended to be heard and not read. These transcriptions are to be used as an aid alongside the audio recordings. If it is possible I recommend you listen to the audio which includes emotion and emphasis, not included in this text. This transcript is produced by a human and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting in print.

If you would like to see any changes to the way this transcript is formatted, then please contact us on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#). Alternatively, please take the time to complete this short online [survey](#).

The rights to any and all poems printed in this transcript are retained by the author, **do not** reprint or copy without the permission of the author. – David Turner, Lunar Poetry Podcasts.

©2018 Lunar Poetry Podcasts

[Episode 118: 4th BIRTHDAY SPECIAL EPISODE – \(01/10/2018\)](#)

Transcript by Christabel Smith.

Producer/Guest: David Turner – **DT**

Host: Abi Palmer – **AP**

Introduction:

DT: Hello, welcome to episode 118 of Lunar Poetry Podcasts, my name is David Turner. Today's episode is a very special one as it celebrates our 4th birthday. Celebrates four years of podcasting, celebrates 118 episodes recorded in eight countries, celebrates 13 hosts and well over 200 poets in our archive and, ridiculously, it celebrates over 30,000 times somebody pressed play on an episode.

As many of you will already know, we have published an amazing anthology, 'Why Poetry?' through our favourite indie publisher VERVE Poetry Press which is out now in bookshops and also available through the publishers themselves for £9.99 – link in the episode description.

In the process of putting the book together Stuart Bartholomew at VERVE asked me to write an introduction to the anthology which made me feel really, really awkward as I've always tried to put guests and their work before me and my opinions. A compromise was reached and we decided that anthology contributor, author of the book's beautiful foreword and bloody good friend of mine Abi Palmer would interview me and the transcript of that recording would form an extended introduction weaving its way through the 28 poems and quotes from the contributors in the book.

This brings me neatly onto today's episode. The resulting recorded interview turned out to be a pretty good record of the history of the podcast and a very good explanation of why I started it in the first place. Most remarkably for two people that talk as much and as tangentially as me and Abi it actually made a lot of sense. Now as embarrassing as it's been to edit an interview in which I'm the guest, I've been assured by some regular listeners that there will be some interest in this episode. If though during this episode you feel it's all a load of insufferable self-centred nonsense then rest assured it won't be happening again and we'll be back to normal next month.

One important note about the anthology is that my wife and co-editor of the book, Lizzy Turner and I have pledged to re-invest all money we make from sales back into transcribing the podcast throughout 2019. Our Arts Council funding ends next month and we can't be sure we'll ever even apply never mind receive more so buying the book will directly support keeping the series as accessible as possible. As always you can find a full transcript of this conversation over at lunarpoetrypodcasts.com

I'm going to be back in the middle of the episode with more names of poets featured in the book and to read another poem from it. But as a taster here are the first 14 poets in the book: Helen Mort, Sean Wai Keung, Lizzy Turner, Grim Chip, Paul McMenemy, Donald Chegwin, Abi Palmer, Travis Alabanza, Anna Kahn, Melissa Lee-Houghton, Nadia Drews, Nick Makoha, Harry Josephine Giles and Keith Jarret whose poem 'Granddad's Conspiracy of Yams' I'm going to share with you now;

Granddad's Conspiracy of Yams

At night, because it is southern Florida,
and because of that summer with the spray-killed
orange trees in every neighbourhood, the government
men arrive in sleeveless jumpsuits and clipped tongues.

As one, they hurdle the fence, measure out the space
between the blades of grass, detect the mounds
of earth you handled; each one they replace with stones.
Hard, small. Not at all the size of what's unearthed.

In silence they work: spades, rakes, gloves, gun, spray.
A snake hiss. The mist of poison set to work on ground
you've cultivated since you first arrived in southern Florida.
They zip it up in body-sized bags. Their badges catch the light.

They alone know the power of your hands. In southern
Florida, at night, they disrupt the earth in your garden
the earth you've so carefully tended
the earth which now tends to you.

©Keith Jarrett, *'Why Poetry?': The Lunar Poetry Podcasts Anthology*,
VERVE Poetry Press, 2018

Accompanying that poem is a quote taken from episode 61 from way back in February 2016 and it begins with me saying to Keith: *Something I've thought about a lot is why people ask, "what are you trying to say with your work?" and not, "what are you trying to ask with your work?"* To which Keith replies, *Exactly! I'm full of loads of opinions but I'm not exactly full of answers! The more I respond to what's going on around me, the more questions I find.*

And aping all good stand-up comedy sets, there's a call back to that later in the episode. Here is me and Abi, we join the conversation shortly after she asked me what motivated me to start the podcast.

Conversation – Part One:

DT: So back in the spring of 2014, that's when I first read at a poetry open-mic night, at The Dragon Café, which is a mental-health support group. Then the following week, I read at Niall O'Sullivan's now legendary Poetry Unplugged. I suppose between then and the summer, I was attending as many open-mic nights and poetry events as I could and because I hadn't had much exposure to poetry, but I was just desperate to know more.

I wanted to know why people kept coming to these nights. I felt like every time I'd seen an open-mic with 10 to 20 to 30 people read, there were at least two people every night I was desperate to have a conversation with. I wanted to ask them these questions, things I was wondering, and I didn't know enough about poetry, so there were gaps in my knowledge, and I desperately wanted to ask these people these questions and there wasn't the space to do that.

Once I'd befriended a few poets, early on I met Sean Wai Keung and Anna Kahn they were probably the first two 'actual' poets to come and talk to me at an open-mic night and we started having these conversations in the intervals, I don't think either of those two smoke, but I have this image in my mind of people huddling round with roll-ups outside poetry events, having these conversations.

Once I started being, not allowed but invited, by other people, I just thought it was ridiculous if other people didn't get to share in those, because I realised immediately that I was lucky to

be allowed into these conversations and, for reasons we'll no doubt talk about, there are huge amounts of people that can't access those conversations and I wanted them to be as public and accessible as possible. I felt like if I started this project, the slightly more selfish thing about it, was that I could get poets to myself for a couple of hours and just bombard them with these questions.

In lieu of me having any literature qualifications, I failed my English Literature GCSE and haven't done anything in terms of literature since I left school, it felt like this could be my own, personal, Creative Writing MA. I acknowledged straightaway that was quite a selfish thing to do, but I reconciled my conscience by making these conversations public, no matter how silly or foolish or naïve I sounded at the beginning.

AP: One of the things you said has come back to me in various forms over several years, that at some stages during the process, you presented yourself to me as somebody who didn't much care for poetry, so my favourite David Turner quote ever is 'My name is David Turner and I fucking hate poetry'. That is from a review, where you reviewed a night you really enjoyed. So my initial impression of you was someone who was intensely passionate about something that you were also intensely objective about and trying to be quite neutral in your approaches to these conversations.

I guess something that's interesting about what you just said is that you went into it attempting to extract information back out from people and have access. Something that's always fascinated me about the podcasts as a series is the range of voices you get and the diversity of types of poetry. Could it be a fair assumption that the conversations are the bit that's always interested you?

DT: It's funny, part of me is slightly embarrassed that I used to so proudly go around saying how much I fucking hated poetry, but it was true and it's still true, but it's true for slightly different reasons now, the deeper I'm in it. When I first wrote that sentence down, I wrote it on several reviews that I did for Lunar Poetry Magazine, back in 2014, which was another reason that the podcasts started, because I was writing reviews of poetry events and spoken-word nights. One thing that led me to have these conversations was that the word count, although it was generous, up to 1500 words, which is exceptionally long for a review, it wasn't long enough to talk about the things I wanted to talk about.

Going back to the point of, 'I fucking hate poetry', I hated poetry with air quotes, what it stood for, how exclusive it could be and how if you said you were into poetry, in most people's minds, it was a very, very defined and narrow thing. I chose not to put air quotes around it, because I didn't want it to seem tongue-in-cheek or like I was trying to back out of it and didn't have conviction, because I really had conviction.

I hate poetry in the same way I hate fine art and I love fine art. If people ask me what I mean, I don't understand how they can't see how closely the love and hate are interlinked. What I think has changed now about what I hate about poetry is slightly different, because if you view what I said early on was a rejection of the established idea of what poetry is, I have to accept that now, four years into running a poetry podcast, I am establishment, not that I'm

an established voice or opinion, but I am as established as anything I would have rejected at the start.

What I hate now about poetry are still those things about refusing access to certain people, still this defined and narrow view and all along, my motivation has been to meet people, because I find most people I meet intensely interesting. The conversations I have, I don't ask facile questions, I don't ask things I don't actually want to know about people. I really want to know these things and I think everyone, as much as possible, deserves to have their say about this thing they love.

This is what I mean about not being establishment, I am a gatekeeper, because I run a series and I choose who comes on. I want to be as generous a gatekeeper as possible because whilst it's very noble to say 'let's smash the system and remove all gatekeepers', all you're doing is setting up a new generation of gatekeepers and with every blow to the establishment, you just set up new little cliques and fashions and groups. Basically, I was just trying to reject that, I suppose.

AP: That goes back to this idea, you've mentioned in the past that when you started up Lunar Poetry Podcasts, you wanted it to have the feel of a zine, so a few aspects of that have been really interesting as a listener. Can you talk about what you mean by that?

DT: My main motivation at the beginning was content over production values, to a certain extent. It was equally at the beginning as much by design and wish as it was by financial circumstances, because unfortunately with podcasts, you can't start unless you have a microphone and a recording device and access to the internet to upload it. That doesn't mean you can't start an interview series, because you could have a tape cassette recorder and you could walk around and meet people, but how you distribute that becomes an issue.

Within that, the thing I loved about zines was because there was no motivation for financial gain, it was just about a subject a person loved and putting out the cheapest and most accessible version of that conversation, opinion, idea, drawing, image. I really loved that and really wanted to embrace that. I suppose one reality of making a podcast is that very lo-fi interviews, I've been going back through some older interviews in the course of putting this book together, and Christ, there are some shockingly bad recordings in terms of quality and it's all my fault.

You do at some point have to accept that if you want to reach as many people as possible, which is sort of the idea of the zine anyway, is that you have to embrace the fact I probably needed to up my game production-wise. I needed to get new equipment, look towards spending some money where possible, to make the conversations as widely accessible as possible and whilst it's nice to have a little bit of atmosphere in a conversation, it can't be inaudible.

AP: So, your role as a podcaster and primary interviewer, it sounds like you wanted to ask a lot of questions and get access and democratise that access to some extent. Has that changed in any way?

DT: I've realised that what it means to make something accessible is not what I envisaged at the beginning. In exactly the same way as what I was rejecting in the term 'poetry', or the idea of poetry, the idea of what access is, is far broader than I imagined at the beginning, because most of what you're talking about when you're talking about access are not things I experience myself.

I'm able-bodied, my hearing is deteriorating, but I still have pretty good hearing and I'm white and cis-gendered and I've learnt along the way how insulting it is to claim you're making something accessible when it's not to someone and how disheartening and upsetting and one of many, many repeated blows that person receives in their life.

I suppose that goes back to production values as well. I probably at one point felt that if I just made something, just transcribed an episode, that would make it accessible and of course, it goes a long way, but it isn't what that is.

Can I say, I've also learnt how to shut the fuck up? Because that's very hard!

AP: It's a really interesting thing, my next question is, I noticed that when you're the interviewer, you do put parts of yourself into the podcast without ever having performed a poem because you find common ground with people, despite the fact you have a really diverse range of performers. The conversations seem to flow very naturally a lot of the time and yet, you've got this range of poets, not from one particular scene, but from a range of scenes, the widest diversity of styles, of genres and of backgrounds of poets I've seen in an organised poetic structure, which it is, ever. How do you know what you're looking for when you choose your speakers?

DT: There is one very, very easy answer and that's if I ever hear anyone, or overhear anyone talking about how they consider their work, pretty much it's a green light to come on the podcast. I made a very conscious decision right at the beginning that two things would happen: I wouldn't read my own work, promote my own work, and I would not only have people I liked on the podcast, because it would have run for about 10 episodes, then stopped.

That doesn't mean to say I've had people on that I hate. The beauty of what poems and poets are is they're so wide-ranging, even if you don't particularly find anything in someone's work, if you sit down long enough to talk to them, there will be areas where you will find overlaps in interest. So that's the main thing I look for, someone who considers the process of what they do. Outside of that, there is obviously the selfish element where I'll choose someone whose book I really love, or I'll see them perform and think 'I have to talk to that person, I love their work'.

AP: I've had the privilege of being involved in one of those round-table discussions, where you basically put a group of people who've never met each other in a room together, sat in a corner, did the sound and let them talk. You said you sometimes let people do the choosing themselves, in that particular instance, did you do the choosing?

DT: I had a Skype conversation with Harry Josephine Giles, who was the host of the 'Access to the Arts' episode that you were a guest on. I allowed Harry to explain to me what they felt

was important to that discussion and I allowed Harry full editorial control of the conversation, then we spoke about possible guests and I suggested a few names. Out of those names, we decided to invite yourself and Andra Simons.

The reality of putting together an episode like that means there are financial constraints and logistical constraints. Harry lived, and still does, in Scotland, so the choice was for me to travel to Scotland and have an all-Scottish, local-to-Harry line-up, made up of poets, or for Harry to travel to London and us find poets based down there. That was the option we chose. There have been other episodes where 'Poetry in Schools' for example, Jacob Sam-La Rose had full control invited Miriam Nash and Keith Jarrett, I had no say in that, nor did I want any.

That's the thing, I suppose, I've had different roles in the podcast and I am host, editor and producer, sometimes all at once, sometimes I'm just one thing.

AP: How do you juggle that?

DT: It's really hard. It happens more naturally now, but I don't think it's necessarily any easier, it just suddenly becomes habit. It's still exactly the same amount of energy. The nature of a single host/editor/producer-based podcast is that you have to be present in the conversation, aware of background noise, make sure your guest is comfortable, the recorder is on, still on, still on, listen to your guest, do not stop listening to your guest.

Make sure the recorder is on, listen to your guest, then and only then, do you get to think about what questions you might want to ask. I don't make notes generally, I like to go in and for it to be a natural conversation. I don't know how relevant this is, but I liken it a lot to the improvised stuff that I used to do, in which whilst you're improvising in the moment, you've probably got an idea of what your middle and end point is to be, then you improvise within that, so I will have an idea of who my guest is and what they might want to talk about, might not want to talk about, which is also important, then how they want to talk about it. Then it's all about getting from the starting point to the middle point to the end.

AP: That's a really interesting thing. I keep coming back to this idea of the podcast and its relationship with zine culture. In that as well, even in the role of editor/producer/host and having to juggle it all and put it together and do it like a series of, not a collage because it's a linear interview process, but that thing where from start to finish, you're assembling a production, an object that goes out into the world, you're collaborating with somebody else and it feels like a collaboration when you're listening.

It's a two-way conversation, it requires both people, sometimes it's a multiple-way conversation, but it feels like there's a democracy to it that doesn't always exist for instance in a poetry performance, where you have to sit quietly and watch one person and read the room as to whether you clap at the end of the performance. Then the next person who's been chosen goes up and then you get an interval when you're allowed to talk for approximately five minutes and then you sit back down.

It's not that. You've created a platform that's far more democratic. I like the podcast as an object for poetry because you can pause it, you can move it around. Has the podcast format been important to you?

DT: I'm really glad you brought up the term dialogue, because that's what I wanted. I wanted to avoid too many things I'd seen at spoken-word nights. The reason I don't read my own work, or out of 116, 117 episodes, the reason I've only read a poem three times on the podcast, and that's in very special circumstances, is because I didn't like going to events where the host would read the first three poems of the night and centre themselves and detract from the guests. I really didn't like that, so I rejected that idea.

My main editorial thought when I'm in a conversation with someone is I'm not actually in conversation with my guests, I'm in conversation with the audience, which as the audience have steadily grown over the last four years, so has my awareness of that obligation, because I do see it as an obligation. If you're demanding an hour or an hour and a half of someone's attention, you need to bear them in mind. You have to centre the audience.

Hopefully I've always been able to give people enough time, it hasn't always worked out like that. Too many podcasts, too many people are involved with projects that are basically just producing a monologue. I've definitely been guilty of taking over conversations too much, talking too much. It's really hard to shut up if you really like someone or if they're sparking ideas at you.

It's also hard if someone's very shy. It took me a long time to learn how to bring someone out of their shell rather than talking over the top of them to fill in the space.

AP: That's something I've admired, knowing you, because we're both talkers. It's interesting to listen to you and watch you step into the professional role and take space.

DT: It's a performance.

AP: OK, so it's a dialogue and a performance at the same time. That's very interesting. What have you learnt about your audience?

DT: That they're really loyal and really, really exceptionally broad-minded, because they seem to equally stick with any guest I put in front of them. It's amazing to think hundreds of people tune in. Most of my audience must not know most of my guests because I don't necessarily know people before I get to talk to them. There are a lot of people who've been on the podcast when I haven't really known much about their work.

People continue to listen to back episodes and I can see through the stats that most people stick with most of the episodes. One thing you learn is about people's listening habits, how people return to subjects and return to episodes. Not everyone shares their identity through the devices they listen on or the software they listen on, but I will see through my stats service that they have returned three or four times to a particular episode.

It's really nice. That's the exact difference and why I love podcasts over radio, because there's a pressure to be live and be present for the radio, a podcast serves the same purpose as a journal in that you can lay it down on the table and come back to it when you're ready. Another thing I've learnt about my audience is that it's global. Right from the very beginning, I've had people in Malaysia, India, Australia, America, Argentina. Apart from the two polar continents, there are listeners on every continent, which is insane and it's really beautiful to be able to give a poet the opportunity to communicate with those people.

I do get properly emotional if I think about that side of things, it's too much to comprehend then I end up being glib and sarcastic to not cry. It's just too much. I cannot get my head around it.

AP: And they're strangers.

DT: Right from the beginning, I expected friends to listen for a while, family members out of a sense of obligation to listen for a little while, but what? Would you give people 10 episodes? That's too much to stick with it unless there's actually some meat there.

You do have to avoid as a podcaster the evil that is an over-reliance on your statistical analysis through whatever hosting platform you use because that is just numbers and it will drive you insane and it's very unhealthy. But what it does, one of the few positives it gives you, is you can see people come back and that there's a natural ebb and flow of the way people interact with the thing you make, which you'll never get, for example, from a collection you release. If you're an artist, you don't get this information.

You get sales information, but you don't know how many times people have picked up your book. I know how many times a good percentage of my listeners have picked up the podcast, it's really fascinating and sometimes, all-consuming.

AP: I'm very aware that you've spent a lot of time providing platforms for speakers from a really diverse, not in terms of content, but of who they are. You've provided a platform for some very difficult conversations that aren't happening in many places in the arts. Can you talk to me a little bit about that, how you've increased the diversity of your podcast?

DT: If anyone asks my advice on how to run a successful podcast, an interview-based podcast, and that is that you have to listen to your guest, because if it's just a list of questions, the audience will know that you're not, the guest will know and everyone's interest will wane, including your own. If you're going to have conversations around difficult subjects.... These are not difficult subjects per se, these are subjects that are very emotive to people and when they're done wrongly, they are very, very painful to the people they affect.

It just seemed the natural thing for me to do and I can't believe that more organisations don't do it. Some do it very well, but a lot make a lot of mistakes. They don't listen to the people they're trying to address. If you want a very, very simple example, if you're trying to talk about access for the hard of hearing to an audio production such as a podcast, you cannot have that conversation unless it involves primarily someone that is hard of hearing.

I mean primarily, to give them full editorial control and to give them the platform, not give them the chance for a soundbite, not give them a chance to give you enough opinion that you can then chop up and frame your own editorial viewpoint, it's to give them the microphone and let them talk about how that's affected them. Also, an extension of that, to acknowledge that it is a single person's experience of the world and that every other hard-of-hearing person listening to that or engaging with that conversation will probably not have experienced it in quite the same way. There will be a lot of overlaps, but they will have their own experiences.

That's why Harry Giles was invited to our Access to the Arts. That's why Khairani Barokka was invited for Access to Publishing. That was why Paula Varjack was invited to talk about artists being paid, because all three of those people already made it their point to publicly talk about these subjects.

That means you've got somebody whose informed about the subject. It also means you're not burdening that person to come up with a whole episode for you. Essentially, once they leave, you profit from everything they've done. That was another thing, I didn't want to be profiting from everyone else's experiences because that is unfortunately what a lot of organisations do as well. By virtue of the fact of you seeming accessible, you bask in the glow of your own accessibility and I don't want that. I want something to be accessible and I don't want the credit of that conversation afterwards.

I do want to be known as an accessible producer because I think it's the right motivation for life, professionally and personally. I don't want to be the one that takes the credit for any conversation somebody else has led or contributed to with their own experiences.

AP: Something you did at the end of the first year of Arts Council funding was to publish publicly on your website a list of stats of the demographic of speakers you had and where the money went, an honest breakdown of exactly where it went. It was notably diverse in some areas, you talked about where there was room for improvement. It was the frankest summary of how an Arts Council budget had been used that I'd seen. What was your intention in doing that?

DT: My intention was to instil some sense of accountability in other producers. If we just talk about the demographic of the guests and hosts, for example, it was a very, very hard thing to put together because it took a lot of trust that my guests and hosts knew that I wanted that information for the right reasons, not to make myself look good because you could twist that information to any purpose you want.

Also, it's not a very nice thing to say to someone they're invited on first and foremost as a writer, then a follow-up email saying 'could you please identify yourself in all these different ways so that I can prove I'm doing what I'm doing?' That took a lot of trust on the part of the people filling out the surveys, which were all anonymous. I waited until everyone had submitted their information before I looked at the results and they were all collated, so I don't know who identified in which way.

The main motivation was to then turn around and say 'this is what I set out to do'. I tried to frame it that way, that this is what I set out to do, these are the areas where I think I achieved those aims, equally these are the areas I felt like I failed, or had fallen short, I don't think I failed in any area, but I did fall short on a lot of things and I tried to highlight what I'd learnt along the way. Like we said earlier in the conversation, a lot of the things I was asking of myself to do as being accessible and having some sort of representation in the whole series, I was far more aware of those things by the time all the questions had been answered, then it was too late to revise the questions, so I was stuck with quite a narrow view.

Although it is wider than a lot of organisations have asked, it was still quite narrow in what I subsequently learnt. The biggest thing I learnt from having an amazing group of hosts and guests come on through these round tables, particularly the round-table discussions, but also the individual one-to-one interviews where we talked about similar subjects and themes, like accessibility and representation, is that every single one of those guests and hosts stated the fact they accepted that mistakes would be made, it was how you then faced up to those mistakes and if you were just honest and held your hands up to say well, we need to improve in these areas, people can live with that.

Everyone knows everyone makes mistakes. There is a pressure on you then to not continually make those mistakes. Although sometimes you learn more and more about people and certain themes and subjects, it can become daunting and almost terrifying to think if I fuck this up, people are going to be really upset, but similarly, the more I learnt about people, the more confidence it gave me to face up to things. People really respect that.

AP: When you talk about how you interview people, how you don't necessarily come with a script or agenda, there's a vague outline but it happens live, it sounds like the same sort of thing has happened with the conversations around accessibility. You've had to listen and adapt the conversation as you've learnt more. Would it be safe to say it's been a user-led experience?

DT: I would say as much as possible, yes, but as part of accountability, it would be wrong for me not to say I have to accept it's not a user-led experience, because I'm still editing stuff. It's a collaboration, where I aim as much as possible to have it, even if it ends up 51%-49%, in favour of the guest or audience, that's better than nothing. Ideally, I would aim for more like 80%-20% with my final 20% being just the mechanics of editing and putting something out, I don't think you can actually achieve that.

That's what's led people to engage with the series, as participants, is I acknowledge that right from the beginning. All people want to know is you're going to do your best to present them as they want to be presented, but the only way they could be properly represented, or presented, is to give them their own show. I give them an episode, but they don't get the show. They get the platform for the time they're on it.

It's important to acknowledge that because it gives you a more realistic idea of what it's possible to achieve. If you go around saying 'Look at me, I give everyone this platform', you're making it about yourself and centring yourself as a gift-giver and we don't want to go down that fucking route.

Middle 'introduction:

DT: Hello, I hope you're enjoying the conversation so far, as I said at the beginning don't worry if you're not... it won't be happening again!

Due to us not planning to publish this conversation in its entirety it did break down a lot and there were also toilet and tea breaks, most of which I got rid of through the magic of editing but this little break here, well nothing could save it.

I thought I'd take this opportunity to thank VERVE Poetry Press for giving me the opportunity to put together 'Why Poetry?' and for that opportunity to allow me to work so closely with my wife Lizzy. It's been a wonderful if very consuming experience. I'll also use this space to give you the names of the other 14 writers in the book, they are:

Luke Kennard, Amerah Saleh, Khairani Barokka, Joe Dunthorne, Zeina Hashem Beck, Kim Moore, Rishi Dastidar, Sandra Alland, Giles L. Turnbull, Susannah Dickey, Mary Jean Chan, Leo Boix, Roy McFarlane and Jane Yeh. It's a pretty stellar line up.

Before we re-join the conversation, I'm going to share another poem from the book by Nadia Drews, this is called;

Punky Sue, I Love You

Flowered eyes flared, I sat there and stared.
She had sugar-spiked, liquorice stick hair.
With ripple-dripped lips, blackcurrant lolly licked hips,
She shone sherbert white through mohair.

On the smacked lino floor by the battered back door
I sat down no protest and saw
With horror bag crisps, as she spoke smoke-wisped lips
Of wounds she had got in her war.

Glue-stuck to her side sniffed limp lifeless cries
From a sickly gripped jelly baby boy.
Cough-dropped dummied tot from a bleak sheetless cot
No peek-a-boo, toy hiding joy.

She told the big girls what she knew of the world,
Of benefits, costs, lost fist fights,
Of what you should give, how often and how

Tattooed tracks marked lifelines black as night

She watched the cracked clock and when she took the knock,
We were kicked out. She cursed and she swore,
She'd never been glad to see those bad lads,
But they kept on knocking for more.

Well, she did a flit when she'd got sick of it,
And it turned out 'she wasn't so fit',
And riddled, slag lads bragged what they had had,
And popping space dust turned to grit.

But I'd been there, I'd seen what a loveheart she'd been,
A bubblegum sticker for keeps,
And when I'm on the floor and I've locked the back door,
I savour the taste of cheap sweets.

©Nadia Drews, *Why Poetry?: The Lunar Poetry Podcasts Anthology*,
VERVE Poetry Press, 2018

And that's accompanied by a quote from episode 86 back in October 2016 in which Nadia says: *Music and politics are the things that have shaped anything that I've put on paper. I was brought up by my mother who has had a lifelong commitment to socialism [...] In middle age, what I'm still trying to act on are those impulses from my teenage years. I think the world is rotten to its core and I believe that music and other art forms, like poetry, can play a role in lifting people's spirit to change it.*

We re-join the conversation just after Abi has asked me what effect receiving funding from Arts Council England for the first time had on the way I produce the series.

Conversation – Part Two:

DT: I can't say anything other than it revolutionised everything I did. It made all the ideas I had possible overnight. It was amazing. The Arts Council have their flaws and the application process is littered with issues and problems, but there is no way I could deny the positive effects having that money suddenly had on the project because it meant I could go and talk to the people I wanted to and it didn't matter if they were in Northern Ireland. I could travel to Belfast, travel to Leeds and dedicate a whole episode on poets who also worked as playwrights and have an episode specifically about poets as playwrights in West Yorkshire.

I could only have dreamed about having such a niche subject, which turned out to be a really rich couple of conversations. I couldn't just wait for people to come to me in London.

AP: And you're taking your audience with you when you turn up. You're opening up a world of poetry that isn't just London. Even as someone based in London, the Yorkshire

theatre episodes are interesting, in knowing there is a niche scene out there which as a listener, you wouldn't have been able to access. It's hard enough just in London, sometimes, just to get out of the house. As a disabled listener who can't get out of the house, sometimes the Lunar Poetry Podcasts can be a lifeline.

You get adopted into a clique and then can't show up enough and that's a disgusting part to me about the creative scene in a country that has some arts budget. It's disgusting to see how many decisions around who is allowed in and who isn't is based on who turned up at the right pub on the right day. That comes with a whole host of problems, so having a podcast that's managed to avoid those pitfalls is exciting. It stops it being lonely and being about anyone's gang.

That's leading me to the next question, you have identified on the podcast as someone from a working-class background and also someone who's had mental-health obstacles and you talk about that very openly. I wanted to ask how that has affected your access to arts, how was that for you growing up?

DT: I'm lucky that I come from a household where both my parents read a lot, mainly romance novels and horror novels, so I was surrounded by books. It goes back to just because you identify in some way, your personal experience will be different to those that identify in the same way. Whilst it's a very valid and true narrative that for some working-class people, the only reading material was a newspaper on a Sunday, that is not the case...

Just because you're working class, it doesn't mean in any way you're unable to engage with the arts. What it probably does mean is you engage with a very particular type of the arts. The same could be said of middle class and above. It's just there probably is a stereotype and it's definitely one I encountered, that poetry is trying to be too clever and if you are into poetry, you yourself are trying to be too clever and that is aspirational and that can be really poisonous when identifying strongly as working class.

As I said earlier, I failed my English Literature GCSE and went on from school to serve a joinery apprenticeship, so became a joiner. I did, for three months, do half of a Fine Art foundation course. I broke my elbow falling off a scaffold and couldn't finish the course, but I was offered places at Wimbledon School of Art and Goldsmiths to read History of Art, but I turned those things down. The reason I mentioned the fact I failed my English GCSE and didn't go to university is because I was having, both times, borderline emotional breakdowns.

That's how my mental-health obstacles have impacted the way I interact with the arts. They have physically stopped me interacting with life and by extension, the arts, because my mental-health obstacles, specifically for me bipolar type 2, has incapacitated me at times, has disabled me physically and mentally and emotionally for obscenely long stretches of my life. It stopped me engaging with anything, never mind the arts.

I wrote a lot in my late teens. In my early 20s, I used to write reviews of art exhibitions I went to for my own amusement. I've always been able to generate or form ideas in my head through a dialogue. I'll either talk to myself or write a conversation with someone else and that's come out in reviews as well. Then I had a really severe emotional breakdown, I suppose

I was about 24. It was the first time I ended up in hospital. It was only a short stay but it was a big thing to happen.

I stopped writing at that point. I didn't write again until I was 33. The spring of 2014, I was admitted to the Maudsley psychiatric hospital in South London and I spent five weeks there. In there, I was encouraged to write. I had issues with compulsive and impulsive thoughts and I was encouraged to write these down because I couldn't articulate them at the time. I've never really had any problem talking about my mental-health state, but at that time, I was emotionally exhausted and couldn't articulate it. So I was encouraged to write these things down and when I left, I had these notebooks of lists, of phrases and sentences, which looked like poems but didn't read as poems.

This is one of the things about this being a journey, or an education, for me in poetry. I now know that they are just found poems, 'list' poems. I didn't know that at the time. I didn't know what these things were that I was writing. Going back to the start, I then went and saw an open-mic event at the Dragon Café, which was a support group I attended and I saw someone read a poem. It was one of the few times in my life where it really felt like a lightbulb had gone off in my head.

I realised that what I wanted to do was talk to people and that perhaps there was something in this medium that would allow me a way of articulating a truth about what I was feeling, but communicate in a way that wasn't centring myself and was accessible for other people to recognise aspects of it. Having spent five weeks in that hospital, a secure psychotic specialist ward called John Dickson, it taught me very, very plainly that not everyone that goes through those things has the ability to talk about their experiences afterwards.

I sort of came out of that feeling as though I had an obligation because if I ever felt I could talk about mental-health problems, then I probably should. I suppose the last four and a half years since coming out of the hospital, what I've been trying to learn along the way, is what was an appropriate time to share those feelings in conversations. What is the right way of talking about your own experiences that would allow space for other people to talk about themselves?

I haven't found the answer and I am probably unlikely ever to find that answer, because of course it varies from person to person, experience to experience and moment to moment as well. Again, it goes back to your motivations. If you're seeking that, people will probably sense it and trust you more.

AP: That's a really beautiful way of addressing a destabilising experience and also it really resonates for someone who also has to physically check out of a scene and come back in. I think having a physical record of the conversations you've been having since 2014 and the learnings you made that in a way, does enable other people to track that journey, that's a really valuable thing to have.

DT: Something that's suddenly fallen into place in my head is that when I first started interviewing people and Lizzy, my wife, was my main co-host, mainly because we were both happy to work for free on this project, and we didn't mind, because poetry had become our

life anyway and it wasn't an intrusion to have these conversations. Early on, the first question would always be 'why poetry?'

I've sort of stopped asking that, or I do ask it, but in more nuanced ways and I try to tailor it to each guest, but it was really important for me to find out *why* would you be doing this? Why are you here, sharing these ideas, to what aim, to what end? Because there's a really strong link with your mental health, because there's nothing more poisonous than wondering what the fuck you're up to, but questioning what you're doing, questioning your own motives, because that can really eat away at you.

You're absolutely right, it was really nice to look back on this archive of evidence of what I was doing and why I was doing it and when I came out of the hospital – I've never really thought of it this way – but I needed something to do. I needed something to fill my time that wasn't destructive. I needed a space where I could talk about those destructive things, because that's what my poetry is. Not that it's destructive, but it is facing up to these hard things in my life.

I think this project, this series, has given me a way to keep shouting into the void that is the internet: Why poetry? It really could be: Why anything? It's the why that's the important bit. I don't understand why people listen, why people come on as guests, I don't understand why I'm doing this, but it doesn't matter, because it's happened and I can't say it isn't happening, because it's there, isn't it?

It's a very real thing that's happened in my life, a very real thing that's happened in my life that my mental-health issues and my predilection to look at more negative things in my life and focus on them, I can't turn this into a negative because it hasn't been a negative.

AP: The Why? question is almost every poem ever written, isn't it? What you've got is a series of Whys? framed in different language. When people are reading their poems and you're having different Why? conversations with each guest, that's what a poem is, isn't it? Different ways of having the same conversation and using language to explore this big, existential hole we're in. Why do we need arts funding? Why is it so important that in this country, we have access to things that aren't solid fact?

I think the politics of the podcast is also an interesting aspect. An interesting thing about poetry is it's something that's lorded by both the left and the right wing in different ways and it's held up as this high art, but also this waste of time.

DT: This has been the most productive waste of time in my life. I think we're really lucky as humans in the West that we are afforded a space to waste our time and it should be embraced. It's difficult, sometimes, if you say to a poet 'It's really great you've got a way of wasting your time', people take it personally, as if you're saying it's not any good or there's no point.

It's the very thing with how we view what art is in the West because it's a very Westernised view of what this kind of artistic representation is, but it is what you do in your spare time

and this is why class politics is so important to me, because not everyone is afforded the time to play around.

Not everyone is afforded the time or permission to waste their time, whether that's because they're from a background where it's heavily frowned upon and they're judged for what they're doing, or they physically can't engage with something, or they are not allowed to identify their own gender or sexuality in public. Or – and I suppose you have to be open-minded – they're not also allowed to write a love poem to Theresa May. I don't know. As disgusting as I imagine that piece of work may be, it's important that someone would be allowed to do that. You can't deny that person this shit they want to make.

AP: I was going to say a really profound thing, but I'm suck on that love poem now! I was just thinking about the luxury of self-expression linking to the luxury of self, that's what it is, isn't it? The luxury of being allowed to be exactly who you are, even if that is a love poem to Theresa May. The only way we're going to answer the Why? questions which lead to language around, for instance, the new language, the fact that non-binary is a recognised term, is a new experience for a lot of people. The fact there are words for certain types of trauma, certain types of experience. If we didn't play with language and create space for questions, we wouldn't have the language to identify what's actually going on in our lives.

DT: Politically, if you see campaigns about other governments and other regimes, to varying and horrifying degrees of punishment, very often what we're complaining about is denial of freedom of expression and it's really poisonous for people. It's so destructive to somebody's being to be denied the chance to define themselves and express themselves the way they want to and if I can play any role in allowing someone to express themselves in the way they want to, I view that as more important than anything I might write myself or any chance to be published or lorded as a podcaster.

Some people may not believe you and I don't give a fuck what they think, because I know in myself that is my motivation. That is what I want to do, give people the chance to chat, even if that's a chance for someone like Donald Chegwin to come on and do his King Prawn poem, something that might seem really stupid to some people, or not stupid, but less important than certain things.

AP: Also it's worth acknowledging the experience of Lunar Poetry Podcasts now being archived in the British Library. They're now a body of literature that's been collected. What did that mean to you?

DT: I was hugely proud of that. It, sort of, runs up against my naturally self-deprecating personality, but I really felt I'd achieved something, because it meant these disparate voices were suddenly in a really established archive. It meant that someone like Mishi Morath, someone that doesn't even class themselves as a poet and in his own words is 'just an open-cicer' is now in a national archive, which will be, until we're taken over by the ants, forever preserved.

AP: Ants love podcasts.

DT: My aims when I started were to learn to make a podcast, to make 100 episodes, that was completely arbitrary, I don't know why I chose that, and to be accepted and archived somewhere. I don't know why that was in my mind. It just felt like that would be... I tell you what, I think it would be that was then my permission to make something and whilst you shouldn't go through life wanting permission, it is a very real thing.

You do want that affirmation and more than that is the permission to do something. I think that's why I felt so strongly that I had an obligation to give other people a place to talk, because I felt like I had no right to be here, because of my background. It's not you can't be published as a working-class writer, it's none of those things, but whilst that is now becoming an easier thing to achieve, it is not the accepted status quo in production and editorial roles.

You are not given the permission to run something as a marginalised voice. It isn't that I don't feel I can be a writer, I feel I can because I physically write and you're not defined as being a writer by being published and you're not defined as a writer through anything other than writing is what my belief is. Taking the next step up, when you're in some position of responsibility and in control of a project, that is not available to people.

That is still only available to a very select group of people in this country. I think I needed that permission and that kind of affirmation to be able to turn around to anyone who ever questioned anything I'd done and just say 'well, they think it's worth archiving'. When I had a meeting with them, they sat down and sold themselves to me, because they knew I had a collection of voices that they hadn't gotten hold of before.

There are many poetry archives within the British Library and they were themselves surprised that there were so many poets they hadn't heard of. That made me really proud. I was really happy that day.

AP: We've now come to the point where we've got an anthology about a podcast about poetry that is now going to be a collection of poetry. What made you want to put a book out in this form?

DT: Right from the beginning, I didn't shy away from the fact I wanted to keep the word poetry in the title, so it became Lunar Poetry Podcasts because when I started, the fashion was to talk only of spoken word and to frame it as a spoken-word project, but I wanted to root it firmly in the act of writing poetry and the tradition of printing poetry on paper because whilst the oral tradition in poetry is much longer and the oral tradition of storytelling is much longer, it was only the advent of the printing press that made any form of literature accessible, because it meant you didn't have to be sitting in the presence of the person telling the story.

I didn't want to lose touch with that. It seemed natural to go from the written word to the spoken word to the recorded voice to a digital form, to then return back to a paper form. It seemed the natural thing to do. All of this is pointless speculation without a publisher and it wasn't until Stuart at Verve Poetry Press said 'we'll do it'. I was like 'yes, OK' because while I had an idea of what it might be, you may as well just be imagining anything at that point if you haven't had a firm offer.

Things like including quotes to go alongside the poems was an idea Lizzy, who's co-editing this book, had. She suggested it would be a really good idea to have them in. I didn't dismiss it, but I didn't imagine a publisher would want to go with that idea and then Stuart said he loved that idea as well. It was just a really perfect way to frame the poems, retain another dialogue, not just dialogue through the poetry but retain elements of the dialogue and root the anthology firmly within these conversations again. That was really nice, that something that leapt to Lizzy's mind immediately, we were able to put that in place.

AP: I've seen the range of writers that are included and some of the quotes you've pulled. I was really interested to see some of the quotes are a lot about the diversity of poetic practice, there's a lot about process, so not just Why? but How? It's fascinating to read as an external observer who doesn't know which poem has been chosen from each person and see it framed like that. Has that been a big part of it for you? It was exciting to hear that's a big part of it for Lizzy as well. You're a husband and wife team, you married a year ago tomorrow.

DT: I met Lizzy at Poetry Unplugged.

AP: So poetry has been a big part of your relationship and the support network you provide each other, I'm also fascinated by and in terms of the dialogue and roles you have. Is the dialogue about practice a big part of the anthology for you? I want to pull Lizzy into that question as well.

DT: The editorial and production process in the podcast is far more weighted towards me. It's a project I started and it is identifiably my project. Lizzy has provided a huge amount of physical, logistical support. She is beyond anyone, the person I've ranted ideas to endlessly and she's enabled me to talk things out and given me a space, because I don't talk about my own ideas that much on the podcast, I need a space to work things out.

We have those conversations over dinner, over breakfast, on the way to work and at night and there wouldn't be a podcast without her. It would have fizzled out. I don't think I would have been able to maintain the energy without having someone else involved. When it came to the anthology, I wanted to make sure she was more involved.

I would say the selection first of all, we each wrote down 30 names of people we would invite to the anthology, then we compared them. Any overlaps went immediately into the invitation list, then the remaining five, six or seven, we discussed and debated about who we should add to the list. As poems started coming in, we each read the submissions independently and again, made a top four, depending on how many submissions there were and the ones we agreed upon went in. We've got fairly similar taste. Where there were divergences, we discussed them further and re-read them. At some points, we said to each other 'This person is probably more to your taste and it should be your choice'.

So there were a couple of times where we allowed the other person to choose the work.

AP: Your invitation to submission definitely didn't mention anything to do with the poems having to have featured on the podcast. Are there poems that have featured on the podcast?

DT: I would say maybe two, three possibly. Most people have been really generous and submitted new work. Some people have submitted previously published work and that will all be credited and listed in the back of the book if people want to know. It just seemed natural and in keeping that we said to people 'all we want to do is give you page space, we don't want to tell you what to submit'.

It reflected more the desire behind the podcast, to just say we want you to be part of it, but we want you as much as possible...and again it's about this collaborative aspect that ideally, we would just give you the page space for whatever you want to show, but in reality, you'll have to submit some work and we'll see what's appropriate and what fits. We'd like to have some idea how it's framed, but essentially you get to choose the four or five poems you submit and it won't be anything other than the things you're happy to submit. It's about finding that blend.

A lot of people that come on, I have favourite poems and there are things I'd love them to read to me, but I won't request them. I want the person in that moment to be happy with how they're represented. We wanted to have that as much as possible in the book as well. There's a huge range of writing. If you think Helen Mort was a guest in episode three back in December 2014 and her work is hugely different, there's no way of saying 'Can we have something like what you did?' but she's since had another fantastic collection, *No Map Could Show Them* and numerous other publications. Her way of thinking about writing I'm sure has changed immensely.

AP: Both being a guest and also listening to the podcast as a collection and a series of dialogues is the sheer number being churned out one after the other and the sheer number of conversations, how they've grown, how they've evolved and the different shapes conversations can take. It's a good reminder that art isn't a fixed object and that we, whether we're listeners, whether we're actually engaging with the form that's being discussed or whether we're an audience, we're not finished yet, any of us.

DT: You've just reminded me of a quote I pulled out for Keith Jarrett and I think it's a really beautiful summation. I had said 'I can't understand why people ask you what are you trying to say with your work and not what are you trying to ask of your work.' His reply was 'I'm full of loads of opinions, but I'm not exactly full of answers. The more I respond to what's going on around me, the more questions I find.' It's almost so succinct, it makes the podcast irrelevant. It just says what everyone has said constantly for 100-odd episodes.

AP: I wish that's what arts education in this country did, I wish it's what GCSE English did. I've tutored GCSE English for years and having to explain to disaffected 16-year-olds that poems aren't trying to tell you one thing is a constant job. I wish they printed that at the beginning of every GCSE syllabus in every country. I wish I'd known that when I was 16. The fact there isn't a locked door. This is the myth of poetry, that there is a locked door and either you get it or you don't and you're constantly trying to solve a riddle like Sherlock Holmes. But the idea of poetry being a riddle is so offensive and sad and so much part of education and what's wrong with aspects of literature education.

DT: It's an idea that's supported and perpetuated, isn't it? The more that was held up as an example and benchmark, the more poetry was written in that style. By far the biggest regret that most poets had on the podcast is that poetry has been traditionally taught so badly in schools and taught as this exclusive club you can only join if you understand and fully engage or can pretend to, with a very select band of dead poets. That is not a rejection of those poets' works, but most of those poets are writing in a way that supports a particular type of government and a particular idea of what empire was, national identity.

It's so easy to imagine why people reject it. That doesn't mean that everyone will come round to love it, because that's the world we live in. Some people will never want to engage with poetry and that's fine, but I do think if you taught something closer to the breadth and depth of what poetry actually is, then more people would respond positively to it. I hope that's what the podcast has done for some people.

AP: That's a really nice point to end it on. Is there anything you wanted to add?

DT: No, I think we've covered everything. We should have done, it's gone on for a while!

Outro:

Hello, you stuck around. Grab a biscuit as compensation for sitting through me talk for an hour! Thank you so much to everyone that has downloaded/listened-to/shared an episode over the last four years. I've really loved having the space and time to talk to you all and share so many wonderful poets with you.

If any of you out there are thinking of starting a podcast I would say just go for it. Bear in mind that it's a lot of work but anything in which you're going to pour your creativity into is a lot of work. Don't let that put you off. Also, don't listen to anyone that says it costs thousands of pounds to get started, that's just rubbish. I produced my first 76 episodes using smartphones, tablets and a USB microphone. And if you don't have those then get in touch with other podcasters, they're a very friendly bunch and likely to help you out in some way.

That's it for today, for more from us visit lunarpoetrypodcasts.com, find us at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on FaceBook and Instagram or @Silent_Tongue on Twitter. I'll be back next month with episode 119 chatting to Bristol poet Shagufta K. Iqbal.

I'm going to leave you with a poem by one of my favourite poets Susannah Dickey which is accompanied in the book by this quote from episode 108, November 2017 in which Susannah says:

It's not the most important thing, to be published, because it's the act of writing and what that gives you [...] It's really lovely to feel like you're getting closer to that stage of producing the kind of material that 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 it similarly, in the way that you respond to others' work.

Which is quite a nice summation and open-ended question as to why people not only write but try to share their work...

This is;

remove the oboe and the joy would follow

- After 'Leander and Hero' by Hannah Lash

it comes in a fur-lined case like a well-cared for recently
deceased firearm it has its own
screwdriver / smaller than a regular
screwdriver / children are always being given small versions
of regular things and asked to call them toys.

Get ready: you are now the mechanic
of something.

When an oboe gets blown it's a chorus of the throat it's a slow and ancient
courtship it's a clown

car horn. An oboe makes debussy's little
shepherd an asymptote it makes sloop john b a little doughy it makes its
player wet and undignified / low

C or high E flat is three UTIs at once this is because the oboe is a witch's finger a
regular

person's store bought ginger stem. The oboe takes you to the forefront
of an orchestra's mind / it sighs goose loneliness.

The oboe wakes you with the clamminess of its
unplayedness / it puts you in spaces that need to be
filled but does not make you interesting. The oboe is not
enough to recuse you

from your decisions / it isn't a baby or a glass eye / or a relative of some historical
interest. The oboe

[brought out]

[shown off]

is a collective gasp / it is dank breath held separate from the whistling
holes in Wabakimi Provincial Park / the uncontrollable
airs of the rest of the world

©Susannah Dickey, 'Why Poetry?': *The Lunar Poetry Podcasts Anthology*,
VERVE Poetry Press, 2018

End of transcript.