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## [Episode 124: Caleb Klaces & Jess Chandler](#) (10/04/2020)

Transcript: Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Caleb Klaces – **CK**

Jess Chandler – **JC**

### **Intro:**

**DT:** Hello, welcome to episode 124 of Lunar Poetry Podcasts. My name is David Turner. How are you lot doing? In a break from the norm I am joined for this intro by PJ a.k.a The Repeat Beat Poet. Hello PJ.

**PJ:** Hello David.

**DT:** In accordance to social distancing measures, we are recording this intro via video call. So it will be a little bit glitchy, I'm gonna fade PJ in and out as we're chatting just in case there are any hums from the Internet. The reason for PJ's presence is that this episode is to be the penultimate episode which I produce and will in fact be the last that I introduce. I'll be standing down completely after episode 125 and what will be just about six years of my life. PJ, I think the best thing is for you to introduce yourself a little bit.

**PJ:** Thanks for having me on like this. By way of introduction, I'll just say that I'm 25 years of age, at time of recording and I've been a poet for five-and-a-half of those years. Almost about the same amount of time that you've been producing Lunar Poetry podcasts. For the full amount of time that I've been a poet I've been listening to these Lunar Poetry Podcasts, so it's informed a lot the way I approach thinking about my own work.

Broadly, I'm a poet, a DJ, a Hip-Hop artist, I've spent the last three years on a kind of permanent tour and gigging at a high rate to help me think about my performance style. I've always loved podcasting and journalism, I was a film writer and journalist for around three or four years as well... so what I'm hoping to do with the Lunar Poetry Podcasts in the short term is just, more of the same really.

I love how clear this podcast is and how much freedom it gives poets to talk about their work, so this is the sort of thing I'll be doing when I take over the good ship Lunar Poetry Podcasts.

**DT:** As regular listeners may know, PJ has already been part of the series, both reading his own work in some of the special episodes, he has appeared as a guest and he has also interviewed Thomas Owoo at the time we were able to have guest hosts.

Had I done my research properly and prepared for this intro I would have found and listed all the episode numbers that you've been part of, PJ, but I will put them in the episode description. So if anyone wants to check out your time as guest or guest host they can just click those links.

I think the important thing to say at the moment is that there won't be any massive changes immediately when PJ takes over but I will be stepping away completely and as time goes by PJ will be free to develop the series in any direction that he wants.

Just a rough timescale, it's gonna be around October-time that you start producing your own episodes and this will be around the sixth anniversary of the series.

**PJ:** Yeah, October is when we planned to move back to a more regular schedule. We had this planned before the global pandemic and so we're making some readjustments to the pre-production but to you, the listener, the end result should be the standard and high quality that you've come to expect from such an esteemed podcast.

**DT:** I don't want to drag this podcast out too much because I know people are here for our guest and the new episode, so I just wanted to introduce PJ so that you knew his voice and

when he popped up in what will be my last episode, the next episode number 125, it wasn't some massive surprise. I hadn't just walked out on all of you.

To today's episode, back on the 7 February, I met up with Caleb Klaces and publisher Jess Chandler to talk about Caleb's latest book, *Fatherhood*. This conversation was recorded before Covid-19 hit Britain so is refreshingly free from any virus chat.

*Fatherhood* was published by Prototype Publishing in 2019 and was longlisted for the Republic of Consciousness Prize and is Caleb's debut novel. After reading *Fatherhood* I became a little bit obsessed with the book and its combination of fragmentary prose and sequences of verse. It took some planning but I was very excited that Caleb and Jess could make it over to Walthamstow to chat with me.

As always you can download a full transcript of this conversation over at [www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com](http://www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com) and you can follow me @Silent\_Tongue on Twitter. There will inevitably be some new social media accounts to follow once I step away from producing the series but I'll let PJ tell you about that in the next episode. That sounds alright doesn't it PJ?

**PJ:** Yeah. It sounds good.

**DT:** Anyway, that's all from me and PJ, but I'll be back at the end of the episode with some more information. One last thing, if you enjoy this episode then do tell people about it. In light of recent events it's become even more difficult to reach new audiences so do shout, or even whisper about us. And lend PJ as much support as you have to me over these years.

Here's Caleb.

### **Conversation:**

**CK:**

[Reading from the beginning of *Fatherhood*]

In the tenth month of my wife's pregnancy, I put aside my lifelong commitment to avoiding harm, and purchased mousetraps. The rodent population had exploded during spring, and now the summer was so hot that young mouse families were fleeing the plane trees' inadequate shade for the cool of the ancient riverbed which lay under the cellar of our rented basement flat. They emerged in our kitchen at night to lap at the spilled juice of the pineapple intended to entice our unborn child into the visible world.

Under the greasy sun, a fox made parenting look elegant. She licked her paws while three squealing cubs dug up a piece of black meat with four legs and a collar. Inside, we sat naked between mounds of bleached-white baby clothes and watched the World Cup. *All these men are alive*, I kept thinking. Layers of shadow billowed on neon turf. The players played on regardless.

My wife had a job. I had a grant to write a novel. A distant relative from the Russian branch of my family had died, unexpectedly leaving us a slice of the proceeds of his bedsit. The will stipulated that we use it to invest in a piece of England. I scrolled through photographs of farms and beach huts, unable to take myself seriously enough to consider a period terrace. When I imagined life outside of the capital, above ground, I already missed the city.

The feeling reminded me of the final summer of university: a blank stretch between exams and results, when everything is over and nothing has yet begun. Ten years before, we had shared an itch. We left our notebooks out for one another to read. After lunch we took pills and whispered about our social responsibilities. On the way from one pub to another we broke off from the group to find a bedroom, any bedroom.

Not since then had my wife and I been so physically involved. We were the only members of our group, but we snuck quietly to the bedroom. We drew the curtains on the watching fox.

This time the logistics—pillows, headboards—were confounding. We rolled away from one another and lay still. It was necessary, all of a sudden, to be polite to the baby. I took chocolate bars from the labour bag and we ate them in the dark. We dreamt we were too old to move.

But the next morning, we slotted together in ferocious agreement. I loved—I don't know how to say this—the feeling that I was drawing the baby out into the world, that my desire was extending a greeting, to which an unseen body might respond. There were so many pulses: in the throat and in the taut, round stomach; in the places where bodies

curve into themselves, fold and open. Each of us pulsed with the blood of the others. I counted myself, counted myself again.

©Caleb Klaces, *Fatherhood*, Prototype, 2019

**DT:** Thank you very much. For the listeners, I'm no doubt repeating what I just said to you in the introduction, which I am going to record in two months' time from now, but in a break from the form of the last few episodes, I am joined by two guests today, rather than one. I always say it's because they do a better job, but it's more that I don't have to do the research. I'm going to let my two guests introduce themselves. We'll begin with Jess.

**JC:** Hello. Thanks very much for having us. I'm Jess Chandler and I run Prototype, publishers of Caleb's novel *Fatherhood*.

**CK:** Hello, I am Caleb Klaces and I am the author of *Fatherhood*, which Jess has published.

**DT:** We're mainly meeting because I bumped into Jess at, which book fair was it? Was it the Small Publishers Book Fair?

**JC:** I think it was the Small Publishers Fair.

**DT:** I asked Jess what she would recommend from the table. Without putting you in an embarrassing situation to your other authors, you did slide *Fatherhood* towards me first. It's because we'd been talking about my own writing and you thought it might interest me. Not only did it interest me, it really blew me away. It's one of the best books I've read in a really long time.

More than that, it hasn't left me since the first time I read it. It's really been haunting me in a lot of ways and I was really desperate to talk to Caleb about the book, but I thought it would be really nice to bring on a publisher and chat about how these types of books get put together and why. I'd like to begin by asking you, Jess, how do you sell this book to people? What description do you give it?

**JC:** Good question. It is a novel, although its form is experimental in many ways. I haven't had any problem in simply selling it as a novel with a narrative, with many of the traditional, novelist elements about it, even though it combines prose and poetry. When I was sent the manuscript, I had been thinking about poets who had been writing novels and that was one of the things which drew me to it, because apart from just the fact that it does have sections of poetry, I think it's written with a kind of ear and care for language and rhythm of a poet, which Caleb is as well.

So I think that's something I would emphasise when describing it to people as well, that it's a kind of hybrid of forms. I had also just become a mother when I read it and I think that obviously meant it resonated with me in lots of ways, although I think I'm also careful to tell people that it's not just a novel that will feel relevant to people with children, because it's about so many other things.

**DT:** I don't have any children. I enjoyed it, even though my wife and I have decided we are going to do the horrible thing and not give any grandchildren to our parents. Caleb, that description from Jess, how does that sit with how you feel about the book?

**CK:** I'm very grateful to Jess for taking that responsibility away from me because I wouldn't necessarily know how to describe it. The nice thing about the novel as a form is that it's capacious enough to withstand quite a lot of internal difference and still qualify as that thing. Is there anything I would add? No.

**DT:** I was thinking about that today, as I was sanding a table-top, because I've been at work and doing my normal routine, but I had a few jobs which allowed me to think about what we might talk about today, which is not always afforded to me when I'm at work. We briefly touched on Sanatorium, which is the new book by Abi Palmer, who regular listeners to the podcast will know.

She's been a guest a few times. I'm looking at the cover of the book now and the tagline is 'memoir, creative non-fiction'. I suppose if I was trying to describe Fatherhood to people, I'd be tempted to use the word memoir, but that loads it with this idea of it being truthful in a way I don't feel is perhaps that important to you.

**CK:** No, it's not, and I think that's partly where coming from poetry, and initially large sections of it were written as stand-alone poems with their own integrity, and I think it was probably written with the sense that comes from poetry where perhaps that question of fidelity to reality, is it fiction or non-fiction, doesn't quite pertain in the same way.

So then when it evolved into becoming a novel, or when that seemed necessary, to write it through and give it the momentum of prose, those kinds of assumptions then carried over for me. I think maybe there's a distinction, I was reading something recently which made a distinction between the personal and the intimate, and I think it's a very intimate book, but it's not necessarily personal. I kind of know what's fictional and what isn't, but it's not that important to me.

**DT:** That's a really brilliant way of framing it, the difference between the personal and the intimate. I read Fatherhood just after finishing my own book and talking to Abi about Sanatorium. We were both trying to find ways of explaining to people that whilst aspects of our own writing seemed very truthful, the realness or the truthfulness of it is not what we're aiming for.

I think both myself and Abi are both aiming for intimacy in our writing. Fatherhood is intimate from cover to cover. I really want to know if it's the truth or not. Before we go too far down that, how did this manuscript fall into your lap? Was it a submission?

**JC:** It was actually sent to me by Caleb's agent at the time, but I kind of knew of it because I'd published Caleb's poetry in the Test Centre, which is the former incarnation of Prototype in our magazine. Caleb had sent us what essentially was the early manuscript, which was a poetry collection.

To my part shame but probably for the right reason, I think now proven, we decided not to publish it. It hadn't quite found its voice and form yet, which probably Caleb came to agree with. I absolutely loved it, there was no doubt I wanted to publish it and I was so excited when Caleb said yes.

It came to me as a prose manuscript, although I knew its history, which made it even more interesting, I think, as somebody who publishes both poetry and prose.

**DT:** I don't normally write many notes. I try not to because I find it – I was going to say 'ruins my interview' style, but I don't really have an interview style – but I feel like once I've written a note, I should read it. There was one thing that kept coming over, and this is definitely a question for both of you, how relevant was it that such an overwhelming series of subjects was confined in such a small book?

Was that a consideration? The stuff that happened was so massive, but it was really interesting it happened in such a neat and confined object,

**CK:** I think maybe I've got two answers to that question, one of which is to do with craft and one is much more psychological. I became aware, at the point when I realised it needed to be a prose novel, that there were all these parts which were pulling in different directions and I realised that I needed something that was in a way as simple as possible to hold it together, because it was on the verge of collapsing under its own, not weight exactly, but under the divergence of its parts.

So there was a need for something simple that would sustain the intensity, because the one thing I wanted was...I was interested in 'what's the highest resolution you can write something?' Particularly this experience, which seemed so much about a different perception of time, or a new kind of intimacy, that I couldn't quite accommodate. Time.

Those kinds of questions then seemed... I seemed much more able to contain them in a very simple, fictional frame and then I could write that through. In terms of brevity, I think that idea of containment, which comes up a lot in psychoanalysis, how do you contain an experience and how can you provide a containing experience for an infant?

I think the book, to some extent, took that on for me, like it was a way of containing certain things. I'd never really thought the smallness might be a part of that.

**JC:** I hadn't thought of that either, but I suppose it is incredibly profound things, parenthood being one of them, but also big issues facing us all, climate change runs throughout, incredibly big things, but it's also small in some ways, dealing with quite a specific moment and time and characters, so it doesn't feel like it's squashing things or that it's too constricted, I think. That's not to make it sound too small. There's a smallness, a kind of privateness, a roundedness to it that suits that.

**CK:** One of the things I was really aware of when writing this was this feeling of a world that had, being a father, become very small and very happily so. That's quite literally, broken

open, like a flood that breaks down the walls between the outside and the inside. So those were the things I was very interested in, what's in the foreground? There was this feeling of there just being this almost all foreground until the background ruptures that.

**DT:** I found it fascinating, that idea of bringing a child into the world, but also being fearful of the world around. So at the same time, the father in the book is trying to teach his child about the world around him, while also trying to completely protect it from the world around it. That conflict between these massive subjects.

I suppose because it does cover climate change and becoming a parent, both of which are enormous subjects, but are very, very much the personal experiences of the narrator. It's not a selfish tale or a selfish individual, but it's very much in the moment. I've seen my friends go through having young babies and they don't seem to have much time for anything else other than making sure that this little person doesn't come to any harm.

I found it fascinating, the work the lead character does on recording systems and how that really mechanical view of recording the data, without really having any emotional attachment to it until a flood almost destroys their whole home, is a really interesting, blinkered way of being very, very acutely aware of the facts without realising it's coming for them until it's too late.

**JC:** The need for a feeling of control, whether or not it's actual control, but ways of feeling you are able to measure and understand, that becomes so important when everything is slightly in chaos.

**DT:** In typical fashion for Prototype, it is a beautiful book and it's really nicely put together and looks fantastic. I suppose such a chaotic and fragmented story is contained really well. As you're saying, Caleb, it could have gone off in so many directions and it feels like you're constantly pulling it back as the author. I suppose it makes sense to work with a publisher who's so neat and regimented.

**JC:** And the simplicity, as you were saying.

**DT:** We've spoken so much before, Jess, you and I, about books as objects and not just as reading material.

**JC:** Which is weirdly relevant for the novel, not to give anything away. I suppose we can explain that notebooks, in particular, are very important in the novel and are something impermanent or things that can actually be lost.

**DT:** We mentioned the floods. I keep wanting to say 'you', we've just established it isn't necessarily you in the book, I should say the narrator of the book loses a book he'd been previously working on to the flood. I did have a note on that. I'm always wondering, I'm quite keen to shed myself of possessions every now and again.

I'm quite happy when I lose a notebook, it frees me up a lot. A question for both of you: how do you feel about lost work? A different question for you, Jess, because it might mean losing someone else's work.

**JC:** That responsibility might not be good.

**DT:** I suppose the attachment to your own writing and how you move on from it.

**JC:** It's painful to read about. It feels devastating, as I'm sure it would if it were your work. It's sort of generative as well.

**DT:** Reading *Fatherhood* and reading about the flood, I didn't have any feelings of 'oh no, what if I lost my work?' But I know how devastated my wife would be if she lost her writing and it really got to me, that's what I mean about the intimacy, in the book there are elements outside of parenting that are very relevant to [me].

**CK:** Yeah. That's a really brilliant question and not something I've really thought about. That part of the story is largely true. I did lose... Or at least, there was a flood in which the only thing I cared about in the house, which was all of my notebooks going back to when I was five, were in drawers, which were flooded and I couldn't look at them for like a year. I didn't realise I was not looking at them until I realised 'oh, why?'

Actually, a lot of this book was written in that kind of lacuna, written in the period between the flood happening and me looking at the notebooks again to see what might be retrieved from them. I don't know what I feel about that, I genuinely don't, but I think something happened, there might have been something liberating by that.

I think the other thing is the kind of metaphorical breakdown, that was also the moment when I was watching a child develop language. We've just been talking about this. There was a weird correspondence between losing a load of literal text and watching a child build something up. It's something to cherish, but I also found it weirdly challenging.

I don't quite know why. I think I felt a loss of her babyhood. There were all the things you gain from talking to someone, but also I felt like it was separating her from the world in some kind of spooky way that I now don't care about, but at the time, it really mattered. I think all of those things were maybe mixed up.

**JC:** Yeah, that discovery and development of language, suddenly you become aware of this understanding developing and that knowledge and a different way of viewing the world that is more real and open to pain. I don't know, there's something kind of scary about it.

**DT:** I don't know if this links, but if it doesn't, I'm going to cut it out. I started writing again in my early 30s. I spent five weeks in a psychiatric hospital in South London and that is not the only time I've been in a hospital. It's the most recent time and I started writing again. I was encouraged to keep diaries and notebooks. I have a box of those notebooks and they feel like they've been in a flood.

I'm wondering now, just to hear you talk about not necessarily wanting to approach them, but eventually you do. I wouldn't mind if they were lost, but whilst they're there in semi-permanence, and they are very real, but they're in a strange state because of the way they were written, I'm now wondering whether that was why that part of the book remained with me, as well as other aspects of it.

I've spoken to a lot of writers, who have unfortunately lost notebooks or hard drives or computers or had their phone stolen or whatever and whilst it's sad for them, and I can empathise, it doesn't really bother me. But there was something about the flood.

**CK:** One of the strange things about the flood, and I don't know if this is quite relevant, is how much life it contains. You think of it as something that destroys human life, but it's full of bacteria and slugs, and your house is full of creatures afterwards. I was very aware of these things growing mouldy and there was another kind of life that was coming out of this.

I was very struck by that at the time I had chosen to procreate and generate more life. The feeling of who gets to decide these things. It does seem quite arbitrary and of course, knowing the profound destruction that humans are causing, that made me feel very ambivalent about it. It stopped me from feeling too sorry for myself, you know what I mean?

**DT:** Now would be a perfect time for a second reading.

**CK:** OK. I'm going to read a new poem from a collection which Prototype will publish, I think, next year, which is really exciting.

**DT:** I thought you meant you think as in at all. I thought you might get a live rejection.

**JC:** Don't worry, we knew about it.

**DT:** 'We appreciate your submission.'

**CK:** Exactly! OK. It's called;

### IKT-SVO

The sun rolls into the chest of the vending machine. Dusk tumbles off the shelf.

Four billion chickens close their eyes and dream of dreaming. Tucked under

the advancing shade, bodies lie down, row upon row, sinking deep into the mosses growing in the corners of the server. Everywhere the earthworms return once again

to their volume on the afterlife. Notions of proximity and distance, above and below,

in front and behind, cease to be altogether precise. A cosmonaut, whom Gorbachev had sent up to Mir, still a Soviet citizen, falls in Kazakhstan *as if to a foreign land*. Perched in the nest that hangs from my father's chin, I look down at a small child with no shadows to speak of on my entire body and I laugh. The door swings open and the shopping arrives. The household insects chuckle in the less obvious machinery. Then it became apparent that it was not because we were laughing that the house was falling down. There was a hurricane. A swollen purple face bubbled up from the broadband. Here comes the sun. Only five billion years to wait now. I find myself tumbling out of the sky. I meet my reflection with a gentle splash.

As it lumbers over the horizon, plants send their roots deep in search of nutrients, cracking rocks. Domestic canines hear the gentle grinding noise as the darkness is shelved and the people rise, struck by the will to stand. The plane lands the same time it departed. Four billion chickens open their eyes and dream of dreaming.

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**DT:** Thank you very much. I will have to be quite strict with myself and ignore that and stick to Fatherhood, otherwise we'll be here all afternoon. We didn't cover it at the beginning, Jess, so maybe it would be good to explain to the listeners which strand of Prototype that will be published under and how it might be different.

**CK:** Is that OK? Would you like me to read something else? I don't want to knock things off course.

**JC:** So Prototype publishes quite a range of different things. Fatherhood, the first book, was in the prose strand. I've called it 'prose' so as to keep it open, because I am open to things that aren't so obviously classified as fiction. The next book we're doing will be a poetry collection so that fits very neatly into the poetry strand.

We publish other things that are more interdisciplinary, that's the best word I can think of for it really, but often collaborations with artists, things that are combining different art forms

and would probably not find a home with more traditional publishers, where the definitions of genres are more defined.

This will be a poetry collection, which is really exciting, and it's how I first knew Caleb's work - as a poet. So it's really great to be able to see and support both of those aspects of his writing.

**DT:** I'm bringing my angry fist down on the poetry now.

**CK:** I don't Google myself, but I just saw on Good Reads, somebody had written a review of this which says: 'Warning. Contains stretches of poetry.' I thought that was so good. Like 'watch out, guys.'

**DT:** My next question could need that warning as well. I wanted to talk about the fragmentary nature of the book itself, how that developed in your own writing. I obviously want to bring Jess in on the conversation as well, but how did the book develop after you submitted the manuscript? What was the editing process?

**JC:** The final manuscript? We didn't do very much editing. Sometimes I think things benefit from my input or somebody's external input, but it was very finished, I think maybe because Caleb had been working on this piece for a long time and it really had found its form.

I don't think you should edit just because you feel that's your role and therefore you should make changes because it makes you seem more engaged. The main things we discussed were to do with the format and how to best convey that into the physical form. Those are really nice discussions. A lot of things that would appear very boring to an outside observer, but like 'should we indent this paragraph?'

**DT:** I think you've got a captive audience, people who actually give a shit about all that.

**JC:** Small decisions and many emails can...

**DT:** Based on your response there, if we begin with Caleb, could you tell us how the book came together ... sorry, I'm laughing about what we chatted about before we started recording... how the process of writing the book came together? Then we can talk about how you worked together, the form of the book and what the final object is. So, go.

**CK:** It really did start in July or August 2014, when my first daughter was born. I decided I was so overtaken with this experience, I should probably write something discrete to get it out the way so I wouldn't just write about it all the time. Of course, that totally backfired. Both were something that felt vital to me as writing, but also felt like a practice that I was interested in seeing how it affected my life.

So parts of that were published in sympathetic journals. At a very early stage, it was useful to have my suspicions confirmed that wasn't right and then it developed into a pretty full-blown poetry collection and then there was a point at which I realised it was not quite pulling all in the same direction. It had started to become prosier and prosier, but it didn't have

momentum, didn't have something pulling it through and that was when it changed. I pulled it together in a summer.

**DT:** What was the main aspect of the narrative that you thought was key to tying everything up?

**CK:** I think there were these two fixed points. There was the birth and then there was the flood and it was writing through them and then beyond. It was the discovery I could do that and then that was quite quick.

**DT:** It's interesting to hear you now say the poetry collection initially wasn't coherent enough and was pulling in too many directions, to then end up with a book that is still pulling in many directions. But it doesn't feel like it's disjointed in any way.

**CK:** To me, when I was writing it, I wanted to get to a point, it's that tension that's interesting, like is it going to fall apart or is it going to carry on going? That was where it felt exciting to me.

**DT:** So then how did the process work between the two of you?

**JC:** It was quite a seamless process really. As the first book in this new series, series in that each book will follow certain aesthetic rules, they will all be different, but same the format, this simple cover with an illustration. This book helped us establish that format, which was nice, but it also meant we had quite a bit of freedom because nothing was yet set.

We had quite a bit of fun choosing an illustration. We found a great Norwegian illustrator called Marianne Arnesen, who had published some of her paintings in another book we did, and saw these illustrations that were on her website. They were weird and abstract and surreal. We tried a few out and chose this image which seemed to speak to a lot of things in the book, although it was something we had just found, it wasn't made for the book.

Then it was just a case of working out how to typographically represent the different tones, because the narrative does move between bits of dialogue, bits of poetry, bits of almost stream of consciousness prose, where it's long, unbroken passages. So we just wanted to make sure those would be visually represented so the readers see where these changes are. It was quite a nice creative process.

**DT:** I quite enjoyed the use of indentation and italics in patches throughout the book, which then linked you into longer passages of what seemed more like stream of consciousness or, if we say poetry, just for this conversation. However you want to define it, it's quite filmic, cinematic in the use of sound, where you give key signatures to characters and you don't realise at the time you're reading it or hearing it, but later on, once those voices become more prominent, you're already used to this, that it's not a sudden attack in change of style.

**JC:** Great that that worked. Perfect.

**CK:** What a beautiful description. Really interesting that was the extended period of the process, really nitty-gritty and tying up. I thought I had consistent ways... because the typography is really important as a way of navigating and signalling different kinds of prose. I knew it was going to be difficult, moving in and out of these different tones and moods and ways of reading, so I'm really pleased if that's the case, that it feels you've got these footholds.

**DT:** I'm not saying other publishers or authors aren't aware of this and I know there are different constraints in terms of budget, but I think too often it's forgotten how much trust you're putting in a reader to hold with you when you're trying to do something that doesn't just follow the standard form of a book.

If you're asking someone to jump between three different voices, you perhaps need to give a handle, especially if you want people to engage immediately.

**JC:** You really miss something if you don't give it that attention. I should also acknowledge the really brilliant designers and typographers I've worked with for many years. They were very much involved in this process and it's really great to be able to leave certain decisions to them, which we did. They have an eye for what works visually.

Having that third voice is really something that adds a lot to the books and perhaps it's a luxury in the process that not every publisher goes into. Often, you have a standard typesetting process, but this is very much a design process, the interior is designed as well as the cover. I think for a novel like this, where it really is important, you'd really be missing something if you just pasted it all in.

**DT:** So who is the second author in the series?

**JC:** The next book coming out just before you'll hear this podcast is a collection of short stories by Jen Calleja, whose poetry collection I published about four years ago. She's also a translator, poet, it's a really great collection. It's called I'm Afraid That's All We've Got Time For. Caleb was saying earlier, I showed him a copy, it's kind of weird looking at the two side by side because they are the same, but different.

**DT:** What do you see as the theme through the series? Or is it still in development?

**JC:** In terms of content, there isn't particularly a theme. Intentionally, I want it to be open. I suppose the privilege of being a publisher on your own is you can really choose things you love and believe in. I think often they will be works that are doing something unconventional, which some publishers might find more risky, but my hope and conviction is that by continuing to take those risks, it becomes established and people trust your choices, therefore the risk becomes less, even though they might be doing something daring in their form.

**DT:** For the listeners' benefit, Caleb has to catch a train, so I'm conscious of not running on for too long. We might wrap up there, other than to say, does your new poetry collection have a title yet?

**CK:** It's called My Little Finger.

**DT:** I don't know whether I will ever manage to do this fully, but I will put links in the episode description to things we've been chatting about. If I say that now, remind me to put it in the outro, or I will be kicking myself when I forget to put it in. Thank you so much for making the effort to come to Walthamstow to chat.

**CK and JC:** Thank you.

**DT:** You're really welcome. I've been wanting to chat to Jess for a long time about Prototype and then this book came along and it was great to be able to wrap the two things into one. I hope it's given people some sort of insight into how books go together, but then you'll have to learn about your own book, won't you? Because they're all different and none of this will be relevant to your book!

We've just wasted an hour, but it's fine. Nothing's a waste, is it? I wrote a note in really big letters: 'How do we let go?'

**CK:** I've seen that question written there and I've been trying to think about it. What it makes you think is, one of the things that still I don't quite understand about this book is the anger in it. I knew it had to be there, I knew it had to be where it was and I knew it had to kind of explode. I still don't quite understand about that, but that seems to me to be about letting something go.

There was something withheld, and held on to, that sort of needed to come out for me. I also think for me, in my real life, but also for the shape of the book and for the narrator in the book. I think that's partly about letting go of certain expectations that you live with, particularly because I am a man, so I perhaps know better about certain ideas about what it is to be a man.

When those ideas come into conflict with a very, very confused sense of what care might look like for a man, I think there was a kind of 'where does this go?' There was a collision that had to find some safer outlet, right? I don't know how we let go, except that in this novel, I think there is a large letting go, somewhere in the middle.

**DT:** I think there are aspects of the fear and anger of not having control over things and the reconciliation of recognising you won't ever have that and then perhaps, you have to let go. There were other things I wanted to talk about first, but yeah, the anger in the book is fascinating. I would say there were high levels of frustration, it's not raging, but you can see there's an anger.

I don't want to use the word bitterness either, but there is a combination of all those things and it struck me as though it was a losing of control or a lack of control that was the root of that. That was my reading. That might reflect more what's going on in my head.

**CK:** This just occurs to me, but it's the only point in the book where it becomes metrical. The verse is not iambic pentameter, but it's essentially iambic. There's a point at which it's

highly structured, metrical verse, exactly what you say, where there's a kind of loss of control and so this acts as some net for that.

**DT:** I'm glad we got around to that as it was bothering me. OK, we really should wrap up. We'll take a third and final reading, but before we do that, we'll say goodbye, because we'll fade straight out. Thank you so much, it's been really fascinating.

**JC:** Thank you so much.

**CK:** I'm going to read a passage from towards the end of the book when the father and his daughter are on a train and the only other people on the train are a blind woman and her dog.

The train moved us on. The woman was soon reading again, more engrossed than before. I wanted a dog to guard me while I exposed myself to words. My daughter pinched my arm and pointed out a cow I couldn't see, or saw a cow that wasn't there, or thought about a cow or felt forming the idea of a cow, or said a word that sounded like cow, like *ow*, the reaction she pinched me in search of, or her own reaction—now that the thought, if not the teeth, had sunk in—to the dog's snap, and I tucked her hair behind her ear and said, I love you. Low branches swept and bumped the top of the train. Something fell through the window. It was a painful sound lying on the table. Squirrel, my daughter said. I touch it. There was blood on the table. The smell of pine disinfectant. The ragged grey and auburn body uncollected. The dog lost control. The woman, tied to the leash, slammed into the chair in front, banging her head, the book on the floor. The squirrel jumped at the window. My daughter burrowed into the seat. The blind woman shouted a magic word and her dog remembered its training. Nothing moved except the squirrel's flexing stomach. It was loosened by the fall. It was pregnant. It was too early or too late in the year for a squirrel to be pregnant. The young conductor had arrived and I told him the squirrel was pregnant. Acne. The smell of sore skin. He hovered a few seats away and muttered about rabies. He messed with his machine. It does not need a ticket. The dog was conflicted. The blind woman stood, apologised again for her outrageous companion and requested, with forceful politeness, to know what was there. The image shot through her body. She held her hand to her throat. She said that it must be reassured that we are not a threat. She took a packet of crisps from her bag. The young man announced that we were six minutes from the airport. A pregnant squirrel required us to restrain ourselves for six minutes. Life seemed loosely held together and brief and weird. And then what? I opened the crisps and shook a few onto the novel I had stopped reading. The squirrel flinched. I saw three heartbeats in the loose grey pelt. My daughter gripped my arm and giggled. I whispered, The squirrel is going to eat some crisps. He's had a shock. He's going to feel better. I don't know why the need for a fictional pronoun, except the bruised bones within the womb within the metal train carriage. My daughter became aware she herself could eat the crisps. The squirrel clattered its fingers on the window. I remembered holding hands in A&E after the red square of thick blood. On the train I asked the blind woman quietly, not wanting the animals to hear, what we would do when we got to the station. She said, She'll smell her way outside. Three

minutes of life until the airport. The delight so sincere in my daughter's eyes that I thought I would concoct any scene, even this one, to share it with her again. The woman was whispering to her dog. Her dog bore a grin as wide as my daughter's. The pleasure was infectious. The train slowed. I placed my daughter in the aisle, keeping her hand in mine. I fumbled our large bag. We shrieked, thinking it had crushed the squirrel, but the squirrel was by my feet. By the dog. In the dog.

©Caleb Klaces, *Fatherhood*, Prototype, 2019

## Outro:

Hello, you hung around to the end... grab a Jaffa Cake. As you will have guessed by now that was Caleb Klaces and Jess Chandler. If you'd like to buy a copy of *Fatherhood* then the best place to do that is over at the Prototype website, simply follow the link in the episode description. There is currently free UK postage included on that title until 12 April so just do it already.

While you're over at their website you might also check out their latest prose offering, *I'm Afraid That's All We've Got Time For*, a collection of short stories by Jen Calleja. And as mentioned in the conversation, Caleb's second poetry collection *My Little Finger* will be out with Prototype in 2021.

As mentioned in episode 123 my debut poetry collection *Contained* was published by Hesterglock Press in February and its release into the world was a little blighted – first by a pretty destructive storm which meant I had to cancel my Cardiff book launch and then the Bristol book launch had to be cancelled because of the global pandemic. I did, though, manage to get at least one launch event in before all this trouble started so I fared better than some.

If you'd like to support me and my wonderful publisher, Hesterglock Press then follow the link in the episode description to buy a physical copy of the book for £10 plus packing and postage or just £4 for a digital copy in the form of a pdf. The book is also available as a series of recordings over on my personal SoundCloud page.

Another writer whose book launch was affected by recent events is Abi Palmer, mentioned a bit during this episode. Her book, *Sanatorium* from *Penned In The Margins* is just great and if you like the sound of *Fatherhood* then you'll love *Sanatorium*. This is the blurb –

A young woman spends a month taking the waters at a thermal water-based rehabilitation facility in Budapest. On her return to London, she attempts to continue her recovery using an inflatable blue bathtub. The tub becomes a metaphor for the intrusion of disability: a triphazard, sat in the middle of an unsuitable room, slowly deflating & in constant danger of falling apart.

Moving between these contrasting spaces - bathtub to thermal pool, land to water, day to night - *Sanatorium* braids fragments of reportage, poetry, and found and posed image, to

form an immersive exploration of the female disabled body. In the space between gravity and weightlessness, waking life and out-of-body experience, readers are invited to question if water is a means for rehabilitation, or if their narrator is simply dissolving...

That's probably enough from me now. Please do welcome PJ when he introduces the next episode and show him lots of support when he begins releasing his own episodes later this year. My dream for this series is to see it reach its tenth anniversary but all I've got in me is to drop it off at the doorstep of its sixth. The series needs a new shot of energy and I think PJ is just the person to provide that. I'm sure he'll do a great job of guiding you through a world of fascinating and innovative poetry.

Much love. Stay home and stay safe.

**End of transcript.**