

**File: Lawrence Cleary – HIW, I, Sarah Moore**

**Duration: 92.56mins**

**Joseph:**

Right hello everybody, it's very nice to see you all here today and your lovely friendly flower like faces.

So we are in for a treat this afternoon and it's my happy duty to start off by introducing the wonderful Mary O'Malley. Mary is a very fine poet I've been reading her work for twenty years. She has been with us throughout this calendar year as our Arts Council UL Writer Fellow. She's a very fine teacher as the students who are here will all know. She's become a close friend and a great supporter of Creative Writing here at UL in the course of the year and we will miss her enormously.

One of the many ways in which Mary helped us during the year was that she came with some other colleagues who are here to teach at the inaugural UL Frank McCourt Creative Writing summer school in New York with the great Donal Ryan who I see down there at the back. And the great Eoin Devereau and Sarah and a group of us.

But anyway on the plane on the way back the four colleagues Eoin, Donal, Mary, well that was it, three and then shortly before the plane landed in Shannon there was an incident. There was an emergency landing, because they weren't sure that the landing gear had retracted so the plane flew around and it dumped fuel and everybody was very upset and frightened about this.

I learnt something about my three lovely colleagues who wrote to me afterwards, Donal Ryan as you can imagine wrote a wonderful very punchy piece of Donal Ryan Flat Fiction which I'm going to keep forever because it's a unique copy of this. Eoin Devereau told me that what he learnt from this experience was that he's truly an atheist, 100%. Because at no point in this extremely terrifying experience was he ever tempted to pray. And I learnt that Mary O'Malley is officially the coolest person I know, because when she wrote to me that Monday morning to say how much she had enjoyed the summer school she didn't mention this incident.

So she's a very fine poet and a lovely person, a treasured colleague and friend and on behalf of all the students and the colleagues who's lives here at UL have been blessed by your presence Mary in the course of this year I want to thank you. It's not over yet, now Mary will be here until

December so those if you in the MA who have the opportunity to keep working with Mary I hope that you will do so.

Anyway she's going to read now, I think from the new collection. A really beautiful book, Mary's eighth collection of poems called playing the octopus. So will you welcome please Mary O'Malley.

### **Mary O'Malley:**

Thank you very much, its lovely to be here. I have to nail the lie, the truth is that I'm superstitious and I'm terrified to talk about that accident because I'm terrified of flying in case I'll bring another one on me when I go up again (laugh).

I once had a kid staying in the Irish College in Paris that I became great friends with a group of kids that were there studying, in Sur Bon. And one of them was a demon, when he found out I was afraid of flying he insisted on drawing a map of the plane showing me which seats were and most dangerous in the event of a crash, which I put in a poem somewhere or other. Because of the coolness of the others and because somebody else panicked for me I didn't.

I'm going to start with a poem about America, written when I was, well at least probably written and certainly started when I was Chair of Irish Studies in Villanova University, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia. And what fascinated me there was the landscape, I'd never been anywhere so flat for so long. And I also started learning things about William Pen's grant that this was a land grab really, land grant initially and I thought its extraordinary the arrogance, mental arrogance of people I don't mean William Pen I mean of a country. What can happen to a country when it totally loses perspective in the world? But that was in a time when you were allowed to lose perspective in the world. Although actually there's some interesting essays from the time written about France and Spain and their greed, exceeding their grasp even then.

But I kept trying to find a way into this landscape and I couldn't really. And eventually I started hearing I thought what I need because where I'm from is to know what the place names mean because of course they didn't mean anything to me. And then I wondered what the endings would have called them so I asked all my students and they didn't know. So this is The Ghost Chant.

*What it is to be a people that lived so likely on the land their own families named each of them for the simple traits they carried or would inherit as gifts upon becoming grown to grow up young.*

*What it must be to lose an entire continent to men who traded in baubles and lies who flourished under false names and then to see your trails cobwebbed in the moonlight, pale, crossed by ghost caravans.*

*They were stitched between mountains across the river we call Delaware. Night raiders ghost encampments. What I am hunting is the syllables of old names. I hear their echoes in the chant, electrifying the body, drumming, singing the wolf's story.*

I'll read one other fairly short poem from that sequence of poems. I had a great time there! This is called Natives

*We were the Natives in all the literature, (I'm from Connemara so most of the books written about Connemara in English are not needless to say written by Connemara people and so the natives were us). English is making strange again contrary as a two year old silence. Irish sticks its tongue out in hard necessary syllables that spit and hiss and contenance like shards of knives.*

*English is not the tool for this, but English is what I have.*

*This is no way to map this frozen place, the sharp light, cars like barges, the flat lean grant of William Pen's tamed share rearing suddenly up a hundred floors vertical but mapping is not what I am at.*

*Not sapping but naming where is the voice of the Indian? I hear it in the wind, feel it flense the skin, strip the wires, buckle the ground under the asphalt. The howl of America growing distance.*

*The tense ghosts and street corner faces, a fox cried last night outside our window for a mate. For foot, for the native, for now.*

And I'll come back to a couple of animal poems out of the annals, out of the, well at least one out of the annals, The Rat. There's a wonderful illustration in the story of Sweeney, whom I'm currently occupied with. Mad Sweeney or Sweeney's Stray as Seamus Heaney so brilliantly translated it, where when Sweeney goes into his rage, his first great rage and St. Ronan has built the chapel or is building the chapel and has set up his altar and the bell. Sweeney hears the bell and he goes ballistic.

He gets the salter and he throws it into the lake, and who should appear but the little otter with the salter miraculously intact between his teeth, looking very cute indeed in the illustration. And this is about the rat and how the rat never ever gets to play a good part. The Rat.

*I'm hunted, hated, feared, they revile my children.*

*Set cats and small dogs to torture me. I too am born.*

*I too live and do little harm.*

*I only eat what is left.*

*They hate me because I'm the late night traffic in their sleeping heads.*

*I am a child of the river and lake not even the monk give me one good deed, he let the otter rescue the holy salter for Ronan. I could have done that.*

*They sent me out among the junkies and rubbish sacks, into the jail cells. I will be here when the seas rise and cover their carcasses.*

*There will be ravens feasting on the next hill, hating still, hating, I wanted none of it.*

*Their curses or their rows or their bloody gods.*

*The raven, blue black on your catwalk ague and peck, there is a conspiracy of you over my head in your black priest dresses go back to whoever sent you from the cave near the volcano I do not want your warning or your news or the hard husks of your coals.*

Just a part about the place I come from and it's about naming really and it's about what happens when places are renamed for the purposes of advertising. I mean that's not obvious, I'm just telling you this. And the whole area I come from has been renamed Ballykeneally which it is not. It has the same number of villages as everywhere else, but it's been renamed for a golf course which isn't really very, as one might wish it. Colonisation by golf course!

*Ballyconneely*

*They are not big feeling people, they did not go after prizes or boast except for the woman in the next village known as the Queen.*

*When strangers mentioned high brazil they let on not to know its name, but spoke only of an island that sank and appeared, sank again every seven years or so they were told, they said to be polite and not disappoint.*

*Among themselves they said did you ever hear tell of Atlantis? One said savfudge which is nonsense but agreed there might be something in it.*

*One said odd there is no signs of ghost after television it was all a cod put out by priest and druids to keep us down. What they told to strangers were not lies just a simple version to excite them and keep them happy.*

*Thus was rhyming what is known as the father of History and at the same time the father of Lies when he only heard what he wanted to hear which became static when he wrote it down.*

I'll finish the poetry and then finish all together you'll be happy to hear with a prose piece. But I'll finish the poems with a poem I really truly keep looking over at the music school, hoping to sort of, I don't know hoping what. I knew about the music school here for a long time and I know a lot of people who have worked here over the years, hoping to hear music really. So I'll read this poem called uilleann for any of you who don't know what the uilleann means in Irish, the uilleann pipes it means the elbow. The pipes are famously difficult to hold never mind to play. I remember hearing Tommy King who very launched this book in Galway or played it in along with the person who launched it, as Joe very kindly did in Dublin, thank you very much. There was one girl who had never, this is the difference between us and America, she had never played any, at least she had never played the pipes or any wind instrument in her life and she came along to learn. Now in Ireland you just wouldn't do that, you'd be too nervous and scared and backwards and whatever, at least I think you would. And so I said what did you do Tommy because there was some very good musicians there as well in the same group. He said you'll find out tonight which was the little concert at the end. And they all played wonderfully or badly or not so well or whatever, all much improved after the week. And this little one played the scales, which was a huge achievement. So this is Uilleann for Brian Burke the painter because he was the one who told me the story that's in the middle of it.

*People sometimes get drunk on the music, one early morning after the night before not having finished the story goes that when a baby started crying his father picked him up, tucked his bellows under his elbow and started playing him. Along with two fiddles, a tin whistle and the piper who tuned into the baby's cries for the Waltz of Limerick.*

*When the baby sick of the noise stopped they were half way through Shoe the Donkey and seeing that it did no harm swung into a storm of jigs, the baby squawking Saddle the Pony.*

*That boy is a slave now to fiddle, harp, malogun. Somehow in all those tunes he has learnt to listen for his own note, he lives on inland water where sound whether the listener hears it or not is magnified and separate and moves over the air like a sky goats' bleat.*

*He avoids the pipes, he has his reasons.*

*He has heard the story of the octopus who was locked into a room for a week to practice when they let him out the pipes had learnt to play the octopus. The thing about musicians is they respond to glory.*

So I'll finish with, I was telling Eoin because he knows this place I was in recently in Finland and when I arrived not only did they speak to me in very good Tirconnell Irish which was a challenge. But they also had some Finnish guy had composed a bit of music for the octopus to play on the pipes and they played it during the reading, so it was lovely and it was good. Sophisticated and you know as the Finnish can be.

This is just a small short piece from a memoir that I am supposed to be writing while I am here, it's about learning to swim. I should probably say that this is not like any ordinary memoir its really about memoir, it's really about the place. Because there's not much interesting about me. So just I was a child like any other child at a time. But a time before Connemara became sort of branded much and a time when the place probably hadn't changed much really in the couple of hundred years. Where there was still the vestiges at least of the Gaelic but in English, what you would call, not saying Gaelic life is silly but nevertheless everything was of course to change very soon after and changing already. Anyway this is about learning to swim, which was still one of the most extraordinary things. If I had learnt to fly I don't think it would have been as good.

*Trocheel is where my father taught us to swim. The sand shelved steeply there at high tide and above the high water mark the liniments of an old ruin are likely traced. The contours of a hillock on an ordinance survey map.*

*There a house was built, against the direction of ?? (place name) the Wise Woman. The bad luck that followed was terrible, all four sons of the house were drowned in a púcán within sight of the shore. (a púcán is one of the traditional boats).*

*She was my brother Martin remarked the planning officer of the day and her decision was final. It was cold, the contours of the body a hard burning. Lie back now my father said stretch out and the water will keep you up.*

*When her turn came her father said stretch out now and the water will keep you up. She walked in up to her neck and when the water started to lift her the exact point of buoyancy, feet still on the sand but barely, her father put both hands under her back, told her how to lie flat and stretch out letting her head well back into the water.*

*Gradually he removed the support until she was held up by the slight assurance of one hand under her spine. Then he said you are floating now and lifted both his arms out of the water. She stiffened in fright, her feet slid towards the bottom and her face went under.*

*She emerged onto the sand spluttering and coughing. She walked again and four, five, six times more she floated briefly and sank like a board.*

*Then one deep breath, a different stretch of her thin body and she had it. Now she could float forever. And if you could float you'd never drown. This was the silent child's time floating she inhabited herself.*

*The sea held her in easy equilibrium and gathered her in, it smooth her like a cold green glove down on the shore. She would come into her own, good girl now you have it.*

*That summer she nearly froze to death entering the sea again and again suspended like seaweed her head sparkling with cold towards September. The delicious green water becoming part of her, covering all except her face.*

*Every morning she woke with this possibility like a glow around her, she was feeling what she would one day learn to call the incredible lightness of being.*

*Then it was time to swim. She walked as before to the point where the tide lifted her body, then her father put a plastic football under her chin and instructed her to doggy paddle. When he judged that the time was right he plucked the ball away. Splashing half way between excitement and terror her face a mask of determination she propelled herself forward like a cat, and didn't sink and didn't give up.*

*And then she did it over and over again, over and over until all the awkward feeling was gone. Her legs and her arms were the right length, the sky and the sea poured through her and even the sun occasionally shone gilding the world.*

*Best of all her breath rose and fell as easily as the tide did. So the family learnt to swim one after another each according to his way.*

*She afraid but not admitting it, her brother determined, her younger sister demanding don't let me go daddy, don't drown me. As was her way.*

*They had to master this lesson first to float without anxiety so that if they were ever out of their depth all they had to do was stretch out, relax and stay breathing.*

*And so they gathered, the little girls and boys each year an extra one floating around their father. With a hand under their backs when they floundered or sometimes just an index finger centred on the spine he kept them up until their breathing slowed down and they could be trusted not to drown themselves.*

*Then it was time for the next step, their efforts resembled the death crows of a hen or a cat, but one by one they competed and persevered. Spluttered and flailed and sank then rose again pale as star fish. They fought among themselves and made fun of one another.*

*Maureen you look like a bit of rubbish, and you look like a drowned rat. There were two reasons she never gave up, one was the murderous competition that large families are prone to. And the other was that time on the strand was free from housework and child minding.*

*Finally they could all float easily, then with delight, and there I see them, those long childhood summers. Our young father standing up to his chest in the tide, his children piloting safely around him like stars radiating out into the bay while our mother sat on a rug with the baby and the sandwiches remote as some film star in a summer dress with her head of dark loose hair.*

Thank you very much.

**Joseph:**

Fabulous, thank you very much Mary. Mary mentioned that when her book was launched I spoke at the launch event in Dublin and the new Poetry Ireland building in Dublin is on Parnell Square where we will be going in a few weeks with members of the current MA in Creative Writing class. The Sweeney poems that Mary was talking about those of you who don't know it's a very old collection of Irish poems about Sweeney who is mad and he lives in the trees and he has a great affinity with the birds, all that. So I turned up I was a bit early to launch Mary's book and the Garden of remembrance is just opposite the Poetry Ireland building.

So I went in there and I was looking through the book and I was thinking what I might say, it was kind of dusk, getting a bit dark. And from behind me I heard a man say, as you sometimes do in that part of Dublin 1 – would you have a few, would you have a euro or two for a cup of tea?

So I turned around and there was a man who I think was homeless asking me for a couple of euro for a cup of tea sitting in a tree behind me. There is only one tree in the Garden of Remembrance. And this man was sitting in it.

So I gave him a fiver because I thought I don't want to mess with Sweeney on the night of Mary O'Malley's book launch.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

Anyway here's a little, a beautiful paragraph.

*I could feel something that I hadn't felt for a long time. Something quiet and difficult to spot. But it was the feeling that you get when someone is listening to you. Really listening carefully.*

*It makes you want to tell things exactly the right way. It makes you want to take your time and explain and get it right.*

Those words were written by my treasured friend and colleague Professor Sarah Moore Fitzgerald who is a distinguished academic and novelist and associate Vice President here at the University of Limerick. Her first work of fiction *Back to Blackwick*, was published in 2013 to very warm reviews. A stage version has been presented at the Edinburgh Festival and at the Arts Theatre in London's West End.

Her second novel *The Apple Tart of Hope* was short listed for the Waterstone's Price and CBI Book of the Year. She's the current recipient of the Irish Writer Centre Jack Heart Bursary Award and her third novel *A Very Good Chance* was published recently also to extremely warm reviews.

I had mentioned earlier on the number of colleagues who came with us to New York this summer to teach at the summer school, Sarah's contribution to that was amazing. We hope to go back to New York next July if the President elect doesn't mind and allows us in! People who read books.

People who attended the summer school and the students who are here today will know that Sarah is simply a wonderful teacher, she's inspiring and uplifting and passionate and creative and funny and warm and wise. My former tutor at UCD the great Declan Kybert once defined the word lecturer as "a person who talks in other people's sleep". That would never happen with our guest today. In fact on the occasion in the

summer school one of the many remarkable memories I have something I've never seen before at the conclusion of one of Sarah's sessions the whole classroom burst into tears and applause at the end. So she's a great teacher and many of us here in the room know that.

I know this in a very special way myself, I've known Sarah for thirty-five years, I'm astonished to say we have known each other since we were teenagers when we did a lot of walking around Dun Laoghaire in the rain talking about books and poems and songs. Sarah I can say in all truth was the first person who ever encouraged me to be a writer and I use the word encourage in its original sense. Because it does take courage and without her encouragement I simply wouldn't have been, even at that age she had more wisdom and empathy and humanity than most people will ever have. And those are some of the qualities that inform her work.

One of the novels that she and I used to talk about a lot and we still do, my students who are here today know that it's a novel that means a lot to me is the great JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. I love that book for so many things, its wit and its characterisation and the voice and I sometimes see faint echoes of that voice in my own work and indeed in Sarah's, with Sarah's work there's always the same truthfulness. The same sense of the world can be a difficult place but even the pebbles in the street might have gasoline rainbows. Good to remember on a day like today.

Salinger writes – what really knocks me out is a book that when you are all done reading it you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours. And you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it, that doesn't happen much though.

How fortunate we are that something like that will be happening today because even better than calling her up on the phone we have the author right here in the room with us. So it's my great pleasure and honour to introduce my colleague Lawrence and the one and only Sarah Moore.

### **Lawrence Cleary:**

Thank you a million that was an incredible introduction and Mary thank you for your reading. I think that as I was sitting there listening I just, you always remember why people have to read these poems out loud because they just are so meaningful when you hear them. So it was brilliant thank you very much.

For people who don't know me my name is Lawrence Cleary, I'm co-director of the Regional Writing Centre and I'm here with Sarah today to talk about how she writes. I know that a lot of the interviews that Sarah

may have done would have been about the books themselves and I did spend some time with the books, partly as a way of trying to help me to understand the kinds of questions I would ask about how she writes. For us in the writing centre a lot of the people who come to us it's not that, first of all we kind of adhere to that whole idea that everyone can write it's just a matter of trying to figure out where it is they need to go in order to get there. And so talking about the process that people write, their process, their writing process and also the situations that they write into and so forth, are really productive in terms of getting your head around how to approach this writing occasion. Like what do we do now?

So that's what we are here for today and so I'm just going to get going because I know that Sarah has to leave at six and what I'll do is I'll talk to Sarah about the process for about thirty-five, forty minutes and then I'm going to invite people to ask questions of Sarah. So the audience will have a chance to ask some of the questions that they have about Sarah's process. I know that it's tempting to ask about the books themselves but I'd like you to learn from Sarah as a writer and how she writes, it's not something you can watch on TV like you can watch a rugby match and you can figure out how to throw a ball or how to kick it or something like that. Or you can watch somebody cook on TV or even fish, people fish on TV believe it or not. You can watch people do that and you can learn how to fish. But who writes on TV? Nobody. Nobody writes, we don't watch people write and it's hard to understand how they go through this process and this is the only way we have to make it visible is by talking about it. And so this is a conversation on writing.

All right, Sarah thanks a million, a million times over for coming in to do this. I know this is, I don't know if you are nervous I'm nervous.

**Sarah Moore:**

I'm a little bit scared.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's great because we have had a lot of exposure to Sarah over the years in the Writing Centre, Sarah was instrumental in getting the Writing Centre started. She was the one that pitched that two-fifty grand that got us going for the first two and a half years. And has supported us ever since.

And also because you write so many books about writing and you know many of your books actually talk about the process and so forth and so in a way we have a strong sense of how you are, sorry we have a sense of the writing processes that you advocate whether you actually adhere to them or not is another issue. But I have a feeling that you actually do, I think that a lot of the things you write about seem to be inspired by what we see you do. Because we do get to see you write, you come into the back room sometimes and you duck in and do some writing real quick and you eat your lunch and you go. And that's really brilliant.

What we always do with these How I Write interviews is to ask the author to characterise their process for people and I think this is a really special situation because you are not just an academic writer, you are also a creative writer. And I think that one of the things that I'd like to see come out of this interview is to have a sense of what you're experiencing as a creative writer in contrast to your experiences, you've developed yourself as an academic writer. But you are developing yourself as a creative writer and I think could you characterise that, is there something that is different about this process?

**Sarah Moore:**

I'll try, first of all I want to say thank you to Mary though for those beautiful poems and that gorgeous extract from her memoir which is still glimmering inside my head. It was just so beautiful. And of course to Joe for his heart-warming introduction. Joe and I are friends for our whole lives and to hear him introduce me in UL here seems like a strange and surreal thing. Because he's been part of my life for such a long time. So thanks a million for that lovely, those lovely words.

And then Lawrence of course I mean before I start talking about the writing process I think you know the fact that we have a writing centre in UL, the fact we have you and Ide as directors breathing life into the a vague idea we had a long time ago about how nice this would be to have. It's all very well to have people who can pitch the idea and get the resources in place but you need people to bring it alive. And the kind of contribution that you make to exactly the kind of conversations that we have now about writing is just immeasurable, it's made a huge difference. And sometimes it's happening under the radar. It really has had a hugely qualitative impact on the way our students learn and the courage that people get or need as you say, and as Joe said to write their first essay or to write their magnum opus and writing is such an important part of everything we do.

So I suppose for me in relation to your question writing has always for me been one of these magical things. I don't know if I have invented this memory in order to justify the kind of processes that I have in my life. But I think I remember as a child having that moment when I was learning to write where I realised that the stuff that was going on inside my head could be scratched down on two pieces of paper and shown to somebody else in a different time, you know writing notes when I was a child for me. I think that's something that children now have been robbed of, I wrote notes to my friends in school and I wrote notes to Joe O'Connor and I gave them to a friend who got on a train and brought that note to him so that he could read the things that were going on.

You know that's an amazing technology. And slipping notes to people and putting things in people's pockets and those secret things that we think and feel and that and when I was thinking about this, this intellectually or theoretically. I remember coming across a really wonderful paper by Janet Emig, I don't even know if that's how you pronounce her name.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

I think its Emig.

**Sarah Moore:**

Janet Emig is her name and in the '70s she wrote this really wonderful paper called Writing as a Mode of Learning, and in it she says that writing is utterly unique because of all sorts of things: because it slows you down, that's one of the beautiful simple things she said. You know I talk from the time I was a child my parents would say stop talking so fast. Thoughts would be tumbling around my head and I had lots of things, bla-bla-blab and then to sit down and have to write because writing is slower than talking. And writing is slower than thinking and it's slower than reading and in the slowing down you give yourself room to realise things and to have breakthroughs. And so for me writing as an action is terribly important and I see it in my students and I see it in myself. And when I'm uncertain about something I will write because writing makes sense of something, it helps you get the measure of something. I think that's true in any genre, I don't think it matters what kind of, even audience you are writing for, the very act of writing is very special and it helps you learn something about yourself from all the things you are thinking about.

If we don't write then we are robbing ourselves of something terribly important.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

So writing these three books and possibly more books in the future what did that bring out? What did that do for you?

**Sarah Moore:**

Well yeah I mean I think, I always, always longed to write fiction. If someone had asked me when I was five what I was going to do when I grew up I would have told them that I was going to be a writer of stories. And it was my heart's desire. It was something that I desperately, desperately wanted to do. And storytelling and story writing for me was the thing I was going to do. And then like most, most of us I didn't become the thing that I had desperately wanted to become. I mean almost everybody doesn't become the thing that they dreamt to be, I think.

I became an academic and still fascinated with storytelling and still fascinating with narrative and still, always a reader of novels. So I had become this you know, like many people an academic and I do remember this secret longing never leaving me. I also remember getting tangled up in academic language to the point and not so much academic language but managerial language in a way that made me feel kind of ashamed of it. I remember one day saying 'going forward', like authentically saying it to somebody and realising that something had happened in my brain to subvert or to kind of use language in a way that was keeping me from the truth, rather than expressing it.

So for me writing for children and writing children's stories was an antidote to that really. I think I was quite deliberate about that, I was saying to myself I can't, I am using language in ways that I hate myself for. And now I have to go back to something very simple and I have to start telling a simple story and I have to write for children, it's a very kind of, sobering is not the word it's a very, it's just a simplifying thing to do. It kind of makes it relevant again. Or at least it makes you try to be. And it makes you try to be honest again and you take the fog away from the way I think, I think for all grownups' language can become a tool to subvert rather than to express the truth, I guess.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

It's very interesting that you are going in that direction, in a sense that I guess for the person who is in the audience which would be like myself

and other people who have heard you speak as a lecturer or in seminars or workshops and things like that. You've always been a good story teller and I don't think that anybody, I personally anyway didn't ever feel like you were subverting anything in a sense it was kind of like you were always so, such a positive energy telling a story and I detected the same thing in the books. I was sitting there asking myself what is the difference in this process? Is there a difference like, in the sense that for instance is there a different assessment of the situation that you are writing into and does that alter the process who your audience is. It's no longer necessarily for assessment it's for entertainment or possibly there's still a didactic element in there. Is there something that is changed in terms of what really, what your audience gets out of you when they hear you or when they read you?

**Sarah Moore:**

A lot of the greatest teachers that I know are just wonderful story tellers. And they understand the narrative arc in a way that helps to make sense of something difficult. So you know, good writing does a number of different things in order to keep you honest. It helps you to show, sometimes it helps you to make something more complicated when on the surface it seems very simple. So it helps you to say actually there's a story underneath this that everybody needs to hear. So under the twitter you know, however hundred and forty characters or whatever it is there's a much deeper story and we need to tell it. Other times communication is about making something that looks complicated actually very simple. I think language can be too complicated and it can obstruct and so I think the exercise of speaking simply and writing simply and of saying something in the simplest possible way is very good.

And yet at the same time I think that language, I was listening to Donal's interview with you in the same format and he told me that there were a million words in the English language and we should do ourselves the delightful honour of at least trying to use them in the way, in the precise and perfect way that they have been designed. And so playing and elaborating can be elegant and simple and beautiful and true too. It doesn't have to be truncated or overly restricted language. I think that sometimes reading something just because it sounds beautiful, just because the words go really well together, I was reading Donal's book, his most recent book and he was talking about something being baked and cracked. I could feel my eyes going over those two words again, like a child playing with the stone, baked and cracked. The sound and the image that it created and how you can linger over sounds and words in a way that gives you greater understanding of something or that just

simply makes you feel glad and happy and interested and engaged. So we have this wonderful tool of language, it helps to slow it down. You can think about how different ways of communicating something in all sorts of exciting ways.

So the joy of writing is for me something that can help us all to be better communicators. Really you know, because lots of time we talk about writing as deeply problematic. I think in academia writing is terribly problematic. I think we wouldn't need a writing centre if it wasn't dreadfully problematic. It makes people feel desperately deficient, it challenges and confronts people's sense of self efficacy. It can make the most accomplished people feel like clumsy and inadequate, it can make you despair at the things that you are saying inside your soul can't, you can't inscribe that anywhere because you don't have the...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

...the space for them.

**Sarah Moore:**

...or even complex intellectual academic work can bring you to your knees, especially. So it is problematic but I don't think we talk enough about the huge joy that this tool can provide for us. That it can connect us and it can improve the way we understand each other. It can as Mary showed earlier on, it can make us feel empathy for a rat. That writing can do that and make you, the narrative imagination that is created through both the process of writing and the product of writing is quite a magical thing.

I'm not answering any of your questions...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

No, no, I was going to go to something you said in your book, because you are kind of making me think about that, well a couple of things that you anticipated in terms of questions that I had. Like for instance you say its Cosmos in Black Brick, he conveys regret over Maggie's death and the grandfather says "yes it was terrible but you can repair life. Even in the middle of the worst tragedies you can imagine there's still the possibility of joy, joy always bubbles under the surface waiting to break through."

The question that came to my head because I see similar kinds of language and attitudes throughout all three books is that you're ascetic. It reminds me of this, I read this essay by Heaney ach Jesus! And it took me forever to read it first of all and I had to read it about twenty times and I'm still not sure if I actually understood it. It is in critical inquiry, the journal he had written in and basically they were evaluated, three poets evaluating what is good poetry. And what is the essential quality and Heaney's take was basically that it had to provide a place for humans to be redeemed. People had to feel that there was some sort of redemption, it was okay to be human and not perfect and broken. In a way that's kind of what I see in these books as well. This message that its okay no matter how tragic things are things will be okay. It's almost a joy.

### **Sarah Moore:**

I think we need to, I really need to believe that. That needs to be my story, it doesn't have to be my story I think about my own kids, I think about their most difficult crisis and I think life when you are seventeen or eighteen or nineteen is really, really hard. I hear myself saying this is going to pass, you are not always going to feel like this. And of course I comfort myself at my worst times.

I mean so the possibility of joy I think is something we need to hold onto in our darkest times. We don't have to see it, we don't have to feel it but we have to believe in the possibility of it again. And so when you are grieving or when you are sick or when you are desperately worried or all this, you know, we operate Lawrence in an environment, an educational environment we need to at least try to be role models for psychological health.

So story telling is absolutely at the heart of that and we can't lose that. I think for me I mean if I think about another one of my reasons for writing fiction you know you get to a certain stage in life it's just the passage of time and this is not self-pity speaking at all. But you get, just because of the passage of time you hit your hard knocks in life. And you lose people you love, you get really sick and things happen to you.

So for me I was operating for a long time in this very professional environment doing all the things that everybody has to do, chairing meetings and generating this kind of possibility deluded sense of competence and cognitive control. Inside like every other human being I was this, I had these oceans of sadness and these moments of existential crisis. Overwhelming thoughts that completely, I mean I think if we are

honest everybody is just stopped in their tracks by these things that happen to us.

For me writing the novels was, particularly the first one, was deeply therapeutic and really important and of course I thought I started out writing this book for my children, because my father had Alzheimer's and so I wrote this book about a boy who desperately didn't want his grandfather to be suffering from this terribly debilitating degenerative disease. And so because of the force of will of his grief he goes back in time and he finds his grandfather in a place where he used to work as a child. So he meets his own grandfather at the same age as him, it's a bit you know like Back to the Future.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Basically that theory.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, I thought I was writing it for my children and of course I was writing for the child inside myself that was grieving.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

The author is the audience in a sense. I get the impression that, I kind of contemplated the idea that maybe you were doing this for yourself. But it seems like when I'm reading the book its actually you are talking to children, you are talking to children you know, I felt like that anyway. It seemed, it wasn't just the message for you and it could have been that it was a message for the author as well but I felt it was really a message for the audience that you seemed to have targeted which would have been young adolescents. Because it all seemed to be around teenagers, they are not you know, they are not pre-pubescent but they are right on the cusp like. So they are going through that kind of, I don't know what that stage is called where they are starting to be rebellious and so forth, slightly rebellious you know. These kids are calm, I mean compared to my neighbourhood (laugh).

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, they are good children I think, my children are good children in the books. But I do think that's a really important time in life, you know, I think really we need as grown-ups to remember that time and we need to think about that time especially as educators. That you are doing things for the first time, you are feeling things for the first time, you're not independent enough to be free of your parents and yet you are suddenly seeing them as imperfect and all the things that you could rely on when you were really small are starting to crumble. And those things you believed in and the stories that you wanted to hear again and again have suddenly become juvenile for you. You are trying to navigate your way through this very rocky, I mean I guess it's such an important time and I am fascinated by the time. and I think also we all need to, maybe we don't all, I need to go back to that time to remind myself of what it felt to be very new and to be encountering things for the first time. And I think as a teacher that's really important, we can become very jaded as teachers and we are teaching the same thing over and over again and we don't, we have to remember that every time we are teaching something we are bringing somebody to something completely new. And unless we remind ourselves and unless I remind myself of that and I keep, I guess that's another one of the functions of my fiction then I think I risk becoming just banal and jaded. I don't tap into all the potential of that energy of youth which is we are all surrounded by it in the University.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Yeah and also at home for you, I mean you have children that are about that age anyway so you would, well actually they are a bit older now but still, I guess if you were to go back to writing 101 you know for a Creative Writing 101 I guess one of the first things they tell you is write about what you know. And so like I wasn't surprised to see you writing about somebody suffering from Alzheimer's and I thought God that must have been tough to confront that and to bring that up and bring it out and kind of tease it out. I could see how it would be kind of therapeutic but it is a valuable lesson in a sense that writers who are starting out have to remember that it is what you know, that you have to latch onto and see where it goes.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah I agree, though I do think that you can become a bit self-indulgent. I mean I'm a novice fiction writer. And I'm not, that's another really important thing to say is that you can, it's really good if you kind of feel

like you are an expert in a certain part of your world to go back to being a novice in a completely different part of your life.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's what I was trying to get to at the beginning with the process I was like are you confronting new things as a writer because you are not the same writer anymore. You are a different writer. This is creative writing.

**Sarah Moore:**

I mean in some ways the process is identical, this is identical to academic writing. In that you need to sit down and you need to figure it out and you need to you know...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

What am I going to say?

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah all that, the craft of writing is very similar I think in my experience between academic writing and fiction writing. The places that you go are completely different, academic writing is actually much safer and arguably more formulaic. And there's a template that I think I certainly am much more familiar with. Now of course there are templates to stories too, they tend to be less visible, not as explicated in fiction writing but they are there. I'm still learning to read like a writer. It's kind of ruined reading...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

As a creative writer?

**Sarah Moore:**

As a creative writer, I'm still, so I now read novels and I go oh I wonder did the editor decide to change that sentence you know. So I'm kind of second guessing and it's taken a tiny bit of the joy away from reading actually. But I think that's inevitable when you, it's one of those things I didn't figure for but has happened.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

I guess that was one of my questions too, like I've been asking you questions about your process and also about your situation, audience is a situational kind of issue, and so is purpose like is this my ascetic, is this what I'm trying to convey, this ascetic. But also there's the whole practical side of things and I guess one of the things I wondered in terms of this new process or this new situation that you are going into and how that affected the process, also wondered how it affected your strategies in terms of did you get anxious, did you feel trepidation about this new context and then also I was wondering things like what roles do people play in this process like did the editors, I know you thank a lot of people and your brother especially at the end, he's in every book. So like all these people who are involved in your process what roles are they playing? Are they giving you feedback on reading, are editors telling you how to format, what kinds of things happen in that?

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah I mean I suppose the really important things for me in terms of other people reading early drafts is, I mean in order for me to start writing fiction I had to, this is a big admission, I had to lower my standards. I mean I wasn't ever you know, I used to, I sabotaged myself by saying I could never write a novel. How could I do that, or I'd be reading these heart breaking works of genius and I would, it was a way of, it kind of prohibited me. Especially because you have these delusions of accomplishment when you get to a certain stage in life so it takes huge humility I think to go back to being a novice and to start and to do something and to stumble around. And I desperately needed reassurance and my brother, you noticed was the one. he's a writer too, we used to spend weekends, he'd come down for the weekend and before the kids got up we'd write together and then very slowly I'd get the courage to show him a couple of pages and he was the one who said you know you really have to keep going. You really do have to keep writing.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Oh right so he's encouraging you.

**Sarah Moore:**

Very much encouraging me and also very, like my husband as well, not indulging my insecurities too much because I am a bit of a kind of Victorian heroin like oh I'll never do it, I can't do it, you know. Almost looking for people to say of course you can. And actually they don't indulge, neither Ben or Ger does that, they just kind of, you know, do it or don't do it just stop talking about it, I'm a bit sick of you (laugh).

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Donal said something similar he said that to himself, he was saying when I interviewed him that's one of the things he said is I keep calling myself a writer, I guess I'd better start writing. This kind of he had to kick his own butt.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, well I love the story Stephen King's wife whose name is Tabitha, beautiful, I don't know why it's so lovely. Isn't it a great name? And he said that he would show her the work and she realised you can't tell someone oh my god this is gloriously good, this is so fantastic, keep doing it. Because then you think your job is to be glorious and your job if you are writing fiction is to tell the story. The gloriousness will look after itself, but you have a story and your job is to find out what that story is and write it. And often you don't know the story until you start writing or at least I don't.

I talked to the masters students about this, that very inspiring thing that the water doesn't flow until you turn on the tap. And that's true for me I don't know if it's true for everybody but until I sit down and start writing I don't know what it is that my story is. And it's one of those great processes, I mean you asked about the writing process, writing fiction is excavation for me. Stephen King talks about that too a lot and I'm very convinced by that metaphor.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

I was kind of wondering about that in terms of your process as well, one of the things I wanted to say was that its obvious, I mean the characters are consistent, they are well developed you know they are believable. In other words I could follow the two and they are pretty consistent in terms

of the way they respond and so forth. So you must have worked on that. You had to have worked on that and I'm sure that in early drafts they maybe are not so well developed and it takes time so like I'm kind of, is it constant revision? Is it constantly going back and like trying to get consistency to make sure that if they say certain things, it's kind of part of their vocabulary?

**Sarah Moore:**

Exactly, drafting and redrafting and redrafting and redrafting and redrafting, you know going back to Janet Emig she talks about writing beingf 'epigenetic' epic genetic, so you can actually if you can bear looking at your first draft and seeing how far a story has come it shows you in black and white literally how much you've learnt about a story and about the characters. I talked about this to the masters group as well I'm really convinced by Helen Dunmore's metaphor that writing a book for her is like going into a dark room and then with each draft you are turning up the light a notch or two. And then by the end you know every inch of it. So you have to tolerate, for me I have to tolerate the ambiguity and the complete uncertainty and the fact that I'm only getting to know a character in the first draft and there are certain outlandish things they do that I realise by draft ten they couldn't possibly be because it's completely inconsistent as you say.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

So you have to peel back.

**Sarah Moore:**

Or that there are two characters that are actually fulfilling the same function and even though it's going to be tons more work I'm going to have to lose one of those characters, kill one of those darlings as I say or merge two characters together in order to make the story more elegant. Take out the redundancies, the repetition, I'm a very self-indulgent first drafter in that I get, I get hold of an idea and I just keep on saying it again and again. And you know my children say that's exactly who you are as a person as well.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Repetition.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah totally, and I'm just so in love with this idea that I just keep on you know stringing it out and if that appeared in the last draft you'd just be irritating, no one would ever read you. And so it's learning to have respect for your audience, you know.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Also lets say, I actually wondered about this myself one of the things I noticed was that you also do a really good job of creating tension, like there's tension pretty quickly in all three books like the tension starts relatively early and it gets carried through and it stays tense and of course there's that resolution at the end where things kind of resolve themselves and they come to some sort of a status like.

**Sarah Moore:**

But Lawrence that comes for me at the very end, the shape of the story only really announces itself towards the end. I have learnt to trust that there is a shape and there is, but my first job as a story teller is to get to know the people who are in this story. And once I know them then they, you know it does sound a bit new-age but they do, they decide. And you know I know...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

So everybody's crisis or those tensions actually arise from the characters themselves.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, and that really feels true to me, I mean you know, I think that's what I would say to novice writers and writers who are learning their craft and I'm, knowing that I'm a member of that group because I'm very much in the early stages of really trying to figure out how I'm going to be, how I'm going to keep on writing for the rest of my life, which I really want to. But it's to trust that you know not to be in too much of a hurry. Because if you stick with writing it offers up its gifts to you in a way that

you can't possibly predict and you know you can't even imagine when you start writing. And so it's a great leap of the imagination to commit to writing a story I think because there are parts of, you know, the best parts of my books I think insofar as I can declare that there are best parts in it, only happen at the very end of the writing process. The nicest bits, the most important bits it's almost like you are building a nest for the greatest moments in the story and they don't announce themselves for me until quite close to the end. And then I know then when I've come, when I'm coming to the end of the story that the jewels have suddenly appeared and I know where they have to go. I've never had to explain that.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

So the veneer comes ...

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah a bit like that, yeah definitely.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's brilliant, I'm sure there's a lot of different ways to go about writing a fiction and I'm sure that there's some people who actually start with the plot and then move from there, and then some people who like you and what I would do I probably wouldn't have a clue what I was writing until I wrote it and then it would develop and I'd play with it and see where it went and if it went some place productive...

**Sarah Moore:**

I'm like you then, that's the way I am and I know that I think another thing that's very important for people to hear as they are working on their own craft is that just because somebody says they do it a particular way doesn't mean that's going to be the way that works for you. And also each, even if I reflect on the three different novels that I've written each one of them has a different trajectory. I think, I understand their rhythm better of how you know a piece of fiction emerges from all this messy work that you do in the early stages. But you know some books arise because you get an idea, sometimes you hear something, sometimes you see, sometimes you read somebody else's work and you kind of steal something. Or some moment that you think has, will give you the

springboard for your own story. So yeah every story like you know has a different, a different...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

How many times have you started a story and abandoned because it wasn't going anywhere? Does that happen?

**Sarah Moore:**

Oh hundreds and hundreds, yeah.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

So it's not like everything is always going to work out, there's going to be some stories that you start that right away you know oh this is going nowhere and you dump it. And then something else happens and you start over.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, none of it is wasted though. Because you learn, you keep learning and the ten thousand hours thing you know, writing you know even academic writing theorists say that all, there's lots of theory available to us to understand writing, rhetoric, composition, narrative, psychology, structure, cognition, but nobody really understands writing as well as the working writer, I think. And we typically are deafeningly silent about our process which is why conversations like this are so useful.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's why this has to happen. Exactly, I wish I could take credit for how I write but I mean it actually, I don't actually know when it started and where in America but like in Stanford, Owensinger (?) I'm trying to think of his first name but he started it there and he does this he videos all of the interviews and he is very flamboyant. He's a great interviewer much better than I would be but he does it for exactly the same reason to try to make this process more visible.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

There's other things in here also that are kind of consistent in terms of their form I notice that for instance all of the chapters in A Good Chance the chapters are horses and the subsections are divided by little seagulls which is cute. And then these are all apple pies I think, I think all pies, every chapter and every section are pies. And then in Black Brick you have the top of the fence there is what separates the sections.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah I didn't make any of those decisions. (Laughing)

**Lawrence Cleary:**

But one of the things that I thought was interesting too was that each of the chapters has sections and I was trying to figure out what was the strategy from the writing stand point and I read in the back of I think it was the Apple Tart of Hope you have a little section in there somebody interviewed you about the process and one of the things you said was like sometimes I just, I have to write, I write up in bed or I'll write early in the morning before my kids get up and that kind of thing. And I was thinking is that, some of these sections are short and some are longer, and are you writing in spurts and is that a section?

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah well one day when I win the lottery or when I've retired I won't, the books won't, they are truncated for exactly the reason that you noticed. I write in fifteen minute chunks at a time.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's exactly what I wondered.

**Sarah Moore:**

And so they are chopped to bits because just, so the books are short and the reason they are short I don't write during hours of daylight. I am a vampire writer, so my fiction writing happens very late at night or when I'm on holidays and often its small snatches of time. These are the only kinds of books I can write at the moment but maybe one day...

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Oh no I was thinking in terms of your process that's why I was wondering.

**Sarah Moore:**

So I didn't mean that to sound defensive!, the breaks probably go with the little pieces in the work.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Sometimes its functional, like sometimes it seems like it's, like time has passed and that's why there's a new section. And sometimes it seems like there's an aside, kind of like the person who is speaking is kind of like off on their own mind talking. And so that's a separate little tiny little paragraph. And sometimes I wasn't sure why it was separated and so I was kind of sitting there thinking I wonder if this is Sarah going okay I have twenty minutes.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yes that is it, yeah, I think that's it. Most of the time yeah.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's very interesting, you kind of have answered one of the questions I had about the fact that you seem to play with sound. I hear you, I hope I can find it, a little ditty that you wrote, usually in academic writing you are not overly conscious of sounding melodic or rhythmic though being conscious of rhythm in your academic work is essential if you want your audience to stay with you. in the Apple Tart you write "everybody filed in, pale faces, blotchy red noses, the whole class melted into a single silent smudge, a blue blur of uniforms shimmering in a giant ghost".

My god she's really playing with language and I thought that must be so joyful after writing academically where you don't get the sound.

**Sarah Moore:**

It is, yeah and though I do think you are right about academic writing, really beautiful academic writing has a melody to it as well.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Oh it has to.

**Sarah Moore:**

And the sentences are beautiful and you know the best academic writing that I've read is a joy to read. Its good writing across all genres.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

There's a trick, there's a trick with academic writing because it's not designed to draw us in, attention to itself. Whereas with creative writing you want it to draw attention to itself.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah and I have favourite words that I think I overuse, I think smudge for some reason is a word I love to use. Smudge and smudgy and smudged, for some reason it's like one of my old toys.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

It's kind of a kiddie word.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, I love it. And I mean I overuse it and that's when my editor says you can't you know that really can only appear once in a novel. (laughing) And then I get a bit annoyed and I go well, I fight for smudge. So yeah there's a great liberation when you've been an academic writer all your career to just indulge yourself in the beauty of language and sound.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Do you like coming back into your academic writing, do you see yourself pulling something from this.

**Sarah Moore:**

I think it's made me better in my, I think it's given me something else. Because its, I'm sure the neurology, it exercises a different part of my brain and then I bring that. So I think there are transferable skills as they say in the business between creative writing and academic writing. I actually think there's huge scope for us as an institution without getting into the managerial to think about how both forms of writing can inform and support each other.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

Oh I agree actually I wanted to say that without, I was afraid to take time away from the interview but I was going to say to Joseph it's like the energy that comes from creative writers is something that I think is positive for us as well. I'm hoping we make beautiful music.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yes absolutely.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

I'm going to open it up to the audience because we are getting close on time. So does anybody want to ask a question, anybody who would like to ask a question of Sarah about what she does, how she writes, her strategies or her processing, anything about her processing. Anything about how she looks, how she approaches creative writing?

**Question:**

I hate using the mic, I'm curious about Cosmo, I think he's such a beautiful character. What inspiration did you have to create him?

**Sarah Moore:**

He is a young boy, he lives with his grandfather and his grandmother and for those of you who don't know the story very early on in the story he

realises that his grandfather is starting to get forgetful and it's not just a standard forgetfulness it's you know he's forgetting. And so I think that Cosmo comes from the childlike anguish that everybody feels when a parent starts to, you know, to decline. And my own father was diagnosed with Alzheimers and was ten years in decline. So there was this really long period of time for me where they call Alzheimers death by a thousand cuts. Because you are just losing the person in this inexorable but very slow way and there's something just dreadful about it. So for me, I mean I was writing I didn't think I was going to write this story but just because it was so, it just bubbled to the surface this terrible loss. I'd also made a conscious decision because I didn't think there was good stories for children about memory loss. So very many children, there's fifty-five thousand people in Ireland who suffer from dementia and if you multiply that by their families children need stories to heal them and to express their anger and anxiety. But of course as I said earlier on to Lawrence it was the child in me losing my dad that I think was the real emotional centre of this story. So that, I mean all of the experiences that I had about my father's dementia or very many of them appear in the book in different ways.

And then also the legitimising of anger you know there's a scene at the end of the story where the grandfather has forgotten something really, really important and Cosmo realises that he has forgotten something really important. And instead of being empathetic and understanding - he's a teenager - and he says "you moron, you idiot why did you forget, the one bloody thing I asked you to do." I remember the moment of writing that and in my head the mother in me was saying "darling don't say those things to your grandfather because you are going to regret it so much". And then of course later in the story he apologises to his grandfather about being angry and his grandfather says I don't remember you ever shouting at me. So there's this kind of forgiving yourself for the anger that you feel when those, when someone you love starts to forget and that kind of decline.

So Cosmo is the angry child in me basically so I'm glad you think he's lovely (laughing).

### **Lawrence Cleary:**

Somebody else, we have Sarah here she's not going to be here in fifteen minutes, this is your chance to ask her questions.

### **Question:**

I want to know who you would consider a good academic writer or a few people maybe.

**Sarah Moore:**

I think Peter Elbow...

**Question:**

No, I'm serious.

**Sarah Moore:**

I think Peter Elbow is a beautiful academic writer. And Pat Benaloff who he writes with all the time. I think, I mean, I think Peter Elbow has that kind of real Pat Benaloff I think we need to go on a bit of a crusade though about not, there's a lot of, there's a lot of debate around this. Often, in fact sociologists Judith Butler always gets ridiculed for the really complex language that she uses. And some people are in her camp and they say look she's talking about really complex ideas and she needs to. And other people say she's just bamboozling people with this deluded notion of verbal majesty. And so I think we need to debate this a bit, I think you can be simplistically critical of academic writing that may have to do the job it does. And equally I've seen as we all have really awful academic writing I think and then really wonderful. I think Peter Elbow is a beautiful example of that.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

He's very conversational.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yes but he doesn't sacrifice theory or the intellectual tradition of his academic displacing either.

**Question:**

Hi Sarah can I just ask you, you are writing for young adults, do you read a lot of that kind of fiction yourself or is it you write for young adults

because it's what you were talking about short novels. But are you a fan of that kind of genre.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, I don't read a lot of YA, I used to. I was a YA, I read a lot of YA and you know the ultimate young adult book for me is Joe referred to it as *Catcher in the Rye*. I think that is, I think a lot of YA wouldn't exist if it hadn't of been for JD Salinger. And so I think yes, he was a kind of really good template I think. I have read a bit of John Greene, I've read some really interesting ostensibly young adult authors that I think I don't understand why they are young adult because I think that they are, I don't quite understand YA actually. Because I think a good story is a good story no matter who, I would be in the JK Rowling camp, who says you know age, defining a book by an age group is a bit like telling you what colour you would wear.

**Question:**

Someone like Michael Morpurgo...

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah I love Michael Morpurgo, but I don't even consider him to be YA, exactly. I think the industry decides what you are but actually the readers will often subvert that anyway. So yeah.

**Question:**

Thank you Sarah you mention and I don't want to create the dichotomy between the academic and the creative but in the creative realm you say that you trust that the characters will shape the writing and you place your trust very often in the characters. Where does your trust lie in the academic piece and where does the shape come from.

**Sarah Moore:**

I think that, because Lawrence asked that question and I think that's what I've learnt is that when you are writing an academic piece I think you should trust, I think I've learnt to trust the process more and not to feel I have to have everything in control. That outlining that I used to do,

say well there'll be this many hundred words in the introduction and this many in the conclusion. These are the sections that I'll have. I've become a bit more fluid as an academic writer as a direct result of learning what I have about creative writing. And I think it's been for the better actually in my case. So thank you.

**Question:**

Thanks for the presentation it was really interesting. You mentioned how a method might be to go back to earlier drafts of works you have done and see how much you've progressed. Would you recommend that, I do it sometimes myself just to see what I've been saying and how a section might have changed and evolved. Just see if I'm happy with the way it's gone from the original. Would you recommend that as an actual practice?

**Sarah Moore:**

I have actually done this with students, I said keep your drafts and just you know, its very time consuming and you know you are making progress you don't necessarily want to but it's really good to demonstrate progress and to demonstrate learning and to give people confidence. Because you forget, you don't realise how far you've come, most students are doing astonishing things by the time they get to a particular stage that they could never have imagined but because it's been normalised for them they don't realise it. And so your job as a teacher is not to say you are great, your job as a teacher is to say look at that and now look at this. And then let them come to their own conclusions. So yes I do recommend it. If you have moments of despair or if you worry about your progress keep your drafts and go back to the early ones because they will teach you something that your current draft can't teach you. So I think I do recommend it. I don't recommend being utterly you know naval gaining to the point that you don't, that you are just wallowing in all of these drafts. But I think it can be a very useful device to demonstrate progress and to give you courage.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

You have a lot of people who support you, in other words I was asking you about the shift into a new context and it's one of the things that I think I've learnt is that you've surrounded yourself with a lot of people they are very encouraging. And encouraging you in this direction and that, you know we always talk in the writing centre when we are talking

to students about who do you incorporate into your process. And is it productive or is it unproductive. Like if somebody shows up with a six pack you know you are not going to get any writing done. Whereas if somebody comes in and is ready to write you know you are going to get more done. So the same thing just having people around you that are positive, it's a hard thing to do.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah, I think you have to choose your early readers very well. There's enough sharks out there and there's enough, we've talked about this in the masters, and you know you'll get to the really critical people at some point if you work hard, if you've earned it. But your early readers have got to really love you because they have to see the possibility in your writing.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

It sounds like with you though they really do, its brilliant.

**Question:**

Hi Sarah, how do you deal with writers block?

**Sarah Moore:**

Just sweeping aside the voices of doubt and saying I only have so much time, I've got so many other things to do, I only have these fifteen minutes in a day. Being really busy actually is quite good for writers block because you don't have time for the voices of doubt to start filling up your brain. And so doing other stuff I think it's quite good. I don't imagine I could ever be a fulltime fiction writer because I think it might paralyse me. I might get stage fright if I had that much time you know and only writing to do in the time.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

I think Hemmingway did gin at noon, he wasn't a fulltime writer.

**Sarah Moore:**

Yeah I think a good schedule and a bit of discipline and something to give you a kick those kinds of things are good. And also as I said lower your standards a little bit, if you find your blocked its often because you are trying to meet impossible standards that you may meet at some point but that right now you are not ready for. That can make you feel very, very unable to make progress. So instead of saying I'm going to write a perfect paragraph just say I'm going to write a paragraph. And give yourself a break. And give yourself permission and tell yourself that it's worth doing because you want to do it. Be a little bit self-indulgent. I don't know if that's helpful but they are the things that have helped me.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

We have time for one more question.

**Question:**

Sarah I was really interested in the whole conversation but when yourself and Lawrence were talking about sound one of the things that we talk about a lot in the masters group is that words are sounds. You know, before they are anything else they are sounds, to some extent what we do as creative writers is quite akin to what a musician does. I mean we do other things as well but I do think writing, creative writing is a kind of performance. I was listening to a radio interview recently with a great play write Enda Walsh and he was asked how do you get an idea for a play. He said I have no other way to explain it but I have to hear it before I can write it. As soon as I can hear it then it's simply a matter of writing it down. So we talk a lot in the group about reading work aloud as part of a process or practice. Is that something you do?

**Sarah Moore:**

Yes and in fact I'm part of a writers group now and one of the members of the writers group Eoin is in the room here. So we meet in the library once a month on Saturday mornings in Limerick city. We just read work to each other. And it's really, really useful. I mean it's almost better, it is better I think than having someone read your work because you get to hear it. You get to hear the rhythms, wherever you stumble that's a clue to you that there's something that's stuck there that you might need to look at. One of the things that I often advise is again if you are blocked and if you are finding yourself, listen to your favourite song, listen to the story in your favourite song. The sound, understand the crescendos.

We've done this exercise in the masters, you know and alone in your room, conduct the song. And think about the moment that really hits you between the eyes or in the heart and it's not actually explainable in language because it's not linguistic its paralinguistic. Its beyond language. It's the sound of a plot. It's the rhythm. It's the way, it's the music, as Joe says. And you can find out something very deep about the story in my view by listening to songs. Not always necessarily your favourite songs but songs that are really popular because they are the ones that have captured a really very wide audience. Have a structure and liquidity to them and moments of drama and turning points and change that have huge echoes in great story telling too. So I think using sound in the MA in creative writing is such a great device for getting almost inexplicable insights into how story works. It's a brilliant thing to do I think and we should do more of it. I mean I know you do but I think that teaching and learning about writing needs to bring music into centre stage I really do believe that.

**Lawrence Cleary:**

That's great Sarah thank you, I'm thinking they are going to throw us out in about ten minutes. So I'm going to have to close this. Again I want to thank Joseph, I want to thank Mary and I want to thank Laura Ashley for helping me put this together. Laura Ashley is our co-op student she's our administrative assistant. She's brilliant. And most of all I want to thank Sarah, we couldn't have done this without a writer who was willing to come forward and say this is what I do. So thank you.

