

Natasha Carthew and Tanya Shadrick: Reclaiming the Wild

Including the Launch of the 2021 Nature Writing Prize for Working Class Writers
Sat 27 Mar 2021 – Ilkley Literature Festival Spring Programme

Natasha Carthew: Hello everybody. And welcome to this really exciting event today for Ilkley Literature Festival. And I'm really pleased to be joined by one of my favourite writers at present Tanya Shadrick. Today we're going to discuss what it means to be working class writer, women writer, nature writer. And so much more, favourite writers. And I also want to speak a little bit at the end about the launch that we're doing of the working-class nature writing fives. So that's a little bit later on, but a little bit about me first.

My name is Natasha Carthew and I'm a writer, fiction writer, poet. I'm the artistic director of the working-class festival for working class writers and also the founder of the nature writing prize for working class writers. And I'm really pleased as I say, to be joined by Tanya. So hi, Tanya, how are you doing?

Tanya Shadrick: Hi Natasha, I'm fine. Thanks for inviting me to join you with this one.

Natasha Carthew: Would you like to say a little bit about yourself for those couple of people who might know who you are? I'm sure most people on social media, for sure. And also, all the festivals we bump into each other quite often, like Kendal Festival, I think was the last one wasn't it?

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah.

Natasha Carthew: So a little bit about yourself and your work.

Tanya Shadrick: Okay. So I'm Tanya Shadrick and I began as a writer after 40, so I'd always wanted to be a writer, but my first published piece was a very local thing. You know, like a small local project at 40, and then I thought I'm going to go for it now. So I worked first as a writer of the outside, this self-made role writing a mile in public, and I just kind of kept it rolling forward from there and just gave a lot of my writing away and then gradually started to get published by national level things and being interviewed on radio, so it's quite an unusual route into being a writer. But then that led me to publishing a book that got on the Wainwright long list, which I edited and published for a woman who died before it was, you know, available for sales. It's gone from there. So I'm really interested in the initiative and what we're going to be talking about. So I'm really passionate about it.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, absolutely. And you've got some good news, you have your new book coming out next February. Is that right?

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah so that's called The Cure for Sleep: A late-waking life because let's face it that's what my life is. But it's also about a lot of people's journeys and changes. So yeah, I'm gonna enjoy reading my first, it'll be the first time I ever read from it today.

Natasha Carthew: Brilliant, we look forward to that. Excellent. Okay. So I think we'll just discuss really what it means to us to be working class nature writers and from a fiction writer as well.

But a lot of people looking at this event today might not think about the journey that we have been on to get to where we are in our different careers. And for me, perhaps, it'll be quite interesting to talk about the barriers, not necessarily for young writers, but for all writers, as you say, your first book was published when you were 40. And so, for you, Tanya, what are the barriers to getting

published from coming from a low income, I suppose, background and a background that didn't have a lot of opportunities?

Tanya Shadrick: I mean, there are so many strands to this as we both know. And as our listeners will know at the top of my mind, and I'm not, I'm going to start by talking about the internal barriers that I put up, because I think the wider social forces, we're all quite aware of because I found from the minute my first short 500-word piece was published locally I have received nothing but encouragement.

My path to publication has been smooth and eased by men and women of all backgrounds. For me, it was a mental barrier. And I'm going to be interested to hear what you say about your journey because I think you started much earlier than me. So I was the first person in my family to go to HE, big thing, it was called going away for an education and growing up. And this is a recurrent motif in my book, I was told I wouldn't need my hands. What a curious thing to say to a child. We won't teach you any of our skills. You won't need your hands with your education you're going to get. So it was a real severance going away to another county when I'd never travelled. I did English. It was the first time I had access to books really. I've only had a few around me growing up schoolbooks and a few Reader's Digests. I just kind of assumed if I got the degree, I'd become a writer because I wanted to be one ever since I can remember what being something was, and then it just didn't happen. Daydream. It just, it went into this strange place in me where all I could do was keep company with what I call dead and distant authors.

So for me, the barriers were mainly because I'd been given the opportunity of income and education, which some people can't get to because of their family circumstances. And yet then I put a whole barrier in place for myself, and it was only after my sudden near death, after the birth of my first child, but I had that genuine wakeup call of, and it still took another 10 years after that. I hope that's not too long an answer.

Natasha Carthew: No and it's interesting because I know that you, when you work, you work with your hands as a writer. Of course, we all do, but I know that you write outside as I do as well.

Tanya Shadrick: And for you, it's like the digging of the earth. It's getting that earth underneath your fingernails isn't it? It's not just sitting at a computer in a box staring out of windows. And both of us, we like to immerse ourselves and I think that's because we're rural writers and we come from that background where work is a very physical thing and it's something you do with your hands.

And do you know, I think that's where I finally broke this double bind in me or this kind of catch 22 or my Gordian knot I call it in the book. You know, this thing I couldn't get, I couldn't find a way to chop through it. And then there was that Seamus Heaney poem. I had a dream where Seamus Heaney visited me. I was like, Oh, I can't write because it's just about my parents. It's just about my grandmother and my, and he just looked at me, went, well, what was my Death of a Naturalist then? And I went and read the book again. And of course, it's talking about digging with the pen.

Natasha Carthew: Yes absolutely.

Tanya Shadrick: And I think when I took my writing out into public and did it as a physical activity and that writing a mile, it didn't really matter what was in it, it mattered that I kept going. I had to do something physical to own the role of writer.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah. And that's for me as well, all my books I've written outside because I feel so much closer to the act of writing. And as you say, the digging with the pen, you just, certain barriers

are broken down and all of a sudden, you're literally just you're writing and you're immersed in nature without actually having to say to yourself, Right. This is it. I'm going to sit at my computer, you just start working you're outside and you start working. And I love that we both work with the paper and the pen or the pencil as well, which is really important to us.

I think as barriers, a lot of people might not understand the barriers for a lot of people, a lot of writers from rural backgrounds and for me as a young person, as well as a poet, having to... you can't go to workshops. You can't access things in the same way as somebody who maybe lives in a city or somebody who has the financial backing of being able to get the train or pay for a workshop. And it's that sort of thing as well.

The barriers and that for me, is why I talk a lot to young people as well, how to get their work out there and how to make themselves push themselves into the world and be positive without kind of, you know, try and get over those barriers, the financial barriers, and it is hard for people and lots of people perhaps don't understand that. That's why for festivals as well, I'm always saying if you can pay people to get to your festivals, to talk about their work, even if they're going to workshops, give people, you know, a 50p ticket or something like that, just to make it more accessible. That's really important to me as a writer.

And I also wanted to ask you Tanya, about authentic voices. How authentic voices for you has helped you as a writer. And how important do you think it is in literature?

Tanya Shadrick: Do you mean by that when I find voices in published work that feel like my own? This is a massive thing for me. And I think you can know, as an individual, regardless of any debates going around in culture, you know whether you broadly are represented in literature by how close to your experience a book is.. So like the first time I encountered anyone even remotely like me was when I got to A level. And I mean, these books used to make me almost fall asleep, because I wasn't used to the density of them, but like Hardy's Wessex, DH Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. You know, I was having to go to different regions and like a hundred years or more back in time to find anything remotely like myself.

And of course we know that North Cornwall's not South Devon, they're not remotely aligned. South Devon and North Devon are not alike. So DH Lawrence's The North, the working class industrial experience, is not, you know, Jeanette Winterson's Northern working class experience is more like mine than an Iris Murdoch book or a Margaret Drabble book, but it's not really the same.

And I just could not find enough rural West Country stories to feed my appetite. I kind of gave up for a long time. Now, of course I'm discovering amazing people, like Hope Bourne, an Exmoor woman who lived on her own in a caravan and was completely self-sufficient and her books are glorious, but they're not widely known.

Natasha Carthew: They're not widely known. Like for me, I'm thinking about Jack Clemo the Cornish writer from the clay country, from the St. Austell area. Not many people know about his work, but he's an incredible, incredible poet. But you have to, you stumble across these writers, because they are not widely known, their publishers, they didn't have a huge publicity machine pushing their work.

Certainly not, I mean, back along, what are we talking? The eighties, the seventies, you know, let alone, when we were growing up. It's just, for me, it's really important in all my work to have some kind of representation. So people can see themselves in the pages of a book, especially young people can say, that's my life. I am important. Somebody has bothered to write about me.

And that, for me, especially in my young adult book, which I have three books with Bloomsbury now, which all deal with different issues to do with young people, but they all have that in common, which is the rural background and the working-class background, the underrepresented voices, which is really what I'm really interested in.

Tanya Shadrick: And you know, I'm a fan. I was rereading it, not just because we were talking because I got this one when we met up at Kendal Mountain in 2018 and they are great for inclusivity. Their open mountain initiative is exactly what we're talking about today. And so it's All Rivers Run Free is the book of yours I know best. And you know, it was rereading it again over the weekend and just like, I've actually marked it because it's such a small thing, but your main character has found this little girl on the beach where she lives in this kind of apocalyptic place that you described so beautifully on a cliff edge. And she's just saying to me, my little mermaid you is, it's just that, Cornwall's not Devon, but I was on the North coast on the border of Devon and Cornwall. And it's just the, obviously I've got tears in my eyes that 'you is'. It's so familiar to me, it's not how my parents or my gran spoke, their dialect was slightly different, but it's so familiar to me growing up and it makes, it gives you that heart pull, it's a bit like falling in love when you're like that's how my people sound.

Natasha Carthew: Absolutely. It's how your people sound, and it is rare. Dialect for me is really important. And I think more people, I think more Northern people are starting to write in the dialects that they're brought up with but, a lot of publishers are still put off by it. A lot of editors are still put off by it and I think hopefully time will change, that people will hear, because sometimes you read dialect and if it's not your ear, you might be quite, you know, you can't, you're not quite in tune, but you continue to read. You absolutely will pick up somebody's voice and it's so much more important.

And I always, when I teach when I do wild writing workshops, I always talk about dialect because for me, to watch two people talking is the greatest way to learn in fiction, how to actually write dialogue and dialect because people never finish their sentences. They're always butting in. You look at the physicality as well, you know, and that for me is just the best way to learn how to write speech. So yeah, so thanks for that because yeah, that's really important.

Tanya Shadrick: And the way you handle dialogue in that book specifically, that's a whole masterclass on its own. And I seriously, I would love us to do a talk somewhere else or for Ilkley in the future, where we look at a book and how it's working, because this is beautifully done and you're right as a reader, you come to it and it's not just the dialect you're using it's the actual grammatical sentences are slightly unusual and you're training the reader to be in the mind and the reader will go with it, we went with it with DH Lawrence when I think back to the boldness of his work, because there's so much dialect in that. My favorite writer growing up was DH Lawrence.

Natasha Carthew: Absolutely. And reading his work made me a better writer, because I was reading them from a very young age, because I wasn't really, I didn't read the books that my age group, I suppose, you know, was supposed to read.

So for me, D.H. Lawrence was, it was just incredible. Who else apart from, do you want to talk about Lynne Roper a little bit?

Tanya Shadrick: I would love to, yes.

Natasha Carthew: Really important to.

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah. So I don't know if people can see no it reverses, doesn't it. So Lynne Roper, I had just begun this late in life crazy thing. So I was going to write, the thing with me is I'm really shy, but then when I decide to go for it, I really go for it. So I was going to write a mile in public on pieces of paper, as long as the outdoor pool I live near. Cause my kids are in school. So I was like, what can I do? I can't go on some big quest, I can't change my life in any other way. So I knelt by this pool for two springs and summers and wrote a mile. I really did it, a hundred thousand words, pen on paper and in the first month of that project, when I had just joined Twitter and had hardly any followers, one of the first people to respond to my first ever shy blog posts was this woman called Wild Woman Swimming, that was her avatar. And there was just like goggles and some bubbles, I couldn't, didn't know what she looked like. And she said, Look, you're doing this little collection of wild swimming because I was going to publish a book as well. I was going to write them all and publish a book of other people's writing. Don't do things by half when I finally get started.

And but then we started to exchange messages, but she said I'm really ill and I've got a brain tumour. I had cancer five years ago and began wild swimming and writing about it online afterwards. But I have left it too late to turn that into anything printed. I'm just too ill. She was even more ill than she thought as it turned out.

And I just on instinct, I went down on my 17th wedding anniversary with my husband and kids got to her hospice and I'm so glad I didn't hesitate, we'd planned to meet in August, but I went there in July and that was our only meeting cause she died three weeks later and she basically, I met her elderly parents. She didn't have a husband or children or a partner. And they just said to me, yeah, we trust you to, and I think they thought I was just going to put her in the anthology I was making, but then it was just too good, so I made a whole book. And it was on the Wainwright 2019 Prize.

Natasha Carthew: I know that is... congratulations.

Tanya Shadrick: I've never worked in publishing. It was just one person, Matthew. Why have I forgotten his last name? He's lovely. Matthew of Unbound gave me one hour of mentoring in exchange for a swimming pool season ticket. And I learned enough in one hour to get a book made that looks like a real book. So that's the other thing about the community once you're in it, there are class divisions and things, but I think what people recognise once you have the confidence or you're helped into the conversation, I have found that just everybody helps.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah. And that's a good point actually, because I ask a lot of questions as well. I've always, I've never been shy with asking questions if I don't understand something. And so in publishing that I've met some incredible editors, incredible publicists, and they all remain on my kind of, you know, on my radar and whilst not friends they're people you can reach out to them and say, can you help me with this? I don't quite understand that. And I think that's why so many people have supported myself as artistic director of Class Festival, which is happening this October is because people understand this is a conversation we need to have. And it's about access. It's about access for writers. It's that access for people in publishing as well to get that foot up. And it's about paying people, internships and things like that, which is so important is to get people involved in the conversation.

Because I always say to people, nobody means to kind of push you out. Nobody means to make you feel like you're from a background where you shouldn't be in publishing or shouldn't be a writer. So it's that conversation that we need to keep open and we need to keep saying to people, are you okay? Do you need help? Do you understand? Because like for me, every publisher is different as

well. So there's a set of rules and ways to be that you don't understand until you, you ask the question.

So I like to tell people that as well as part of my, you know, my Class Festival and Nature Writing Prize hat on is everybody is actually lovely. And they don't mean to exclude you just kind of have faith. And also when people are sending in their work to editors, I always want to make sure that people understand it's not personal and, you know, and if your story's really good, then you know, you've got to hook somebody and have faith in that.

So I think with a lot of working class writers, it's about getting people to have that self-belief which a lot of people have missing. So it's really just trying to keep positive and spread that positivity far and wide really.

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah. And I think for me, I've always, so my first career, I worked in HE as my first career. I was like a senior student, you know, I used to widen participation and get people from backgrounds like my own into the university I worked for. But before that I went, because I graduated with a first-class degree and it was back in the nineties when like pretty much everything I applied for, I got offered. And so I had a choice and I chose the least prestigious of the many internships that were offered to me. Cause it was in a humble little place up because I didn't feel I looked right. So I was again, offered lots of opportunities, but then I took myself away from them. That's a big theme in my book about how often I turned away from opportunities I'd worked hard to reach because of the discomfort that I felt always. Now I don't feel that anymore. I don't worry about how I dress, or how I sound, but back then I was too new a person, some people, and I think you had this, I think you had that confidence. An identity from a very early age.

I don't think it's true that all working-class people lack confidence. You know, Jeanette Winterson was always a force of nature, wasn't she? you know, she got herself into Oxford and she read A-Z in the local library while sleeping in a mini.

I had some of those qualities of self-belief and effort fullness, but the identity side took a lot longer for me, which is why I'm like you, I'm passionate about speaking, not just, so many people that ask because I'm giving two weeks of free mentoring now, for instance, 14 people that I don't know, they're all going to get an hour of my time just to talk about themselves and their creative identities. They don't even have to be published or aspiring writers, they may just want to have a creative life privately and write in their diaries. I think that's important. And I say to them that a lot of them want specific advice on how to get their poems published. And actually, I draw it back a little bit and I go, a lot of this is about your belief. How are you going to keep going?

Even if your poems don't get published, the publishing often comes quite a lot later than the years of keeping going. And that's where the real work gets done, I've already got some poems. How do I get them published? Sometimes that happens to people. It happened to me really quick once I started to write things, but Lynne's book, for instance, I tried to get some people interested in it and didn't have any interest. So I did it on my own. I didn't crowd fund. I just used some savings and I did it and it's found a readership. It's yeah, it's the keeping going and finding a supportive network that's really important. Especially if you come from a background where you don't know anyone that's made something.

Natasha Carthew: That's true. I mean, a lot of people, we don't have our ...we're not connected are we? In the same way as a lot of people, I always say this about people who have had their book published. And then, then this is from experience. I don't have a lot of friends who are then, I didn't go to university. So then those people aren't then editors of magazines or they write for, they're a

journalist for the Guardian or it's that sort of thing. So you can't call up your mates and say, I've got this book out. Will you review it when you talk about it?

That goes on a lot, but a lot of people like us do not get those foots up, you know, those steps up. So for me, it's self-belief, but that's a taught thing as well. Yeah, because when I was younger, you can go one way or the other. And I just said, right, I'm going to kind of just push, you know, push myself up and out as far as I can, but you're completely right. It's about the writing and then its belief in that writing. And then you kind of put out.

My new book, which is out the end of April, called *Born Between Crosses* celebrates the working lives of rural working-class women in Cornwall. So some part of it is people I've known, family, and some of it is people I've spoken to, and it's a collection of prose poetry, which I absolutely loved writing. And at the time I was, I didn't have an editor. I didn't have anyone to... who was going to pick it up and say, right. Okay. I don't know. It's not like I had a book deal like my publishers with fiction. So for this new prose poetry project, I had no idea where it was going. I just had that passion to write it. And I was really lucky that it got picked up by Hypatia Trust, which is a Cornish charity who do a lot for women and literature. So, and that was just kind of one of those things, as you say, with Lynne and then winning the, not winning the Wainwright Prize, but getting on the Wainwright list it's that sort of thing. You just, things that you can't actually imagine happening. And when they do it happens for the right reason doesn't it? Because you haven't been thinking about that publicity plan and if things will not work out the way you want to in that respect.

Tanya Shadrack: Something that if you try and do it here, so people can see, I do this a lot these days, and this means I'm going to do it in the words of a Gillian Welch song, I'm going to do it anyway, even if it doesn't pay, right, I'm going to find a way to do it anyway. And I'm also materially and frankly, ambitious for my work. So I do all the business of it. My mentor is a sculptor David Nash. He comes from a very different background than me and it's lovely having a mentor who's an artist actually, because he talks about the process. And he said to me very early on, when I, cause he met me when I just done, he came to my door and knocked on my door, cause he'd read my first ever little local essay about paintings and railings. And he was my new neighbour and said, this is the real thing you've got to keep going. That's your job is to keep going.

And you know, he said, you've got to divide life. If you're going to be serious about what you do, you've got to divide your life into thirds. A third of it is the work. A third of it is talking about the work, which doesn't mean formally promoting it.. It means finding people you can talk about work with like we're doing now, like, we're both doing with people on Twitter editors as well as other writers. And then a third is the rest of your life.

And it kind of is that commitment. And of course, and I love Philip Pullman, he's got a lovely, little essay about expecting to get paid for your work. He says cause in the first years, before you get your first publication, you're not going to get paid. You're going to have to do other jobs unless you've got a trust fund, there's going to be hardly any time to write. So when you do start getting published, it's important to cultivate a reputation for liking to get paid, quite well.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, and that's something when I started up Class Festival was it came from going to festivals and not being asked if I needed help with transport or hotel, or if I wanted to be paid, I mean, of course we want to be paid. And I always think of festivals, bar staff will be paid before the writers often.

Now this I've talked about on BBC Front Row three years ago and now I have yeah, I do see a lot more festivals saying we will be paid even if it's 50 quid, but they pay for your train fare or whatever

it is. They've got to push because otherwise, you will have the same writers talking about the same things to people who can afford to go.

Tanya Shadrick: And this is my first time with Ilkley, and I hope not my last, but you know, absolutely clear terms and conditions. Contracts sent beforehand, the same with Kendal Mountain. They pay a really good fee. They pay travel, they pay accommodation for overnight guests. The Charles Causley Festival, I'm hoping to be with them next year. They don't have such a big budget cause it's a really small festival, but again, they've got terms and conditions and a fee, and it matters.

Natasha Carthew: Festivals are just, I mean, Ilkley are one of the ones that have always done their writers proud. One of the oldest festivals, the oldest festival in the North as well. So we're really lucky to be here today as part of their festival. But yeah, it is important.

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah, and this is part of what we can do with this wonderful initiative, you're setting up. Cause it's the prize that you're going to be talking about later, but it's also the Class Festival and all the events around it that you're going to be doing. And you know, I'm going to be part of some more of those later in the year, but like, what we're able to do is say to people there's a number of different conversations and threads to you achieving your hopes for your writing life or your pub-, I'd call it a public life actually, because it isn't always my published work.

It's a public life. I get to meet people outside my friends, outside my social bubbles. This has opened up the whole world to me. And I think that's much more, it's a much better term than just being a writer. It's a public life. Okay. And oh, now I've lost my thread and I didn't want to, because it was really important. Right.

I'm not going to embarrass, just keep moving. And if it comes back to me, I'm going to, I've got so many things. Oh, oh, damn it's gone. It's important.

Natasha Carthew: I'll tell you what we'll do I'm going to read a poem from my new book called Born Between Crosses, which comes out in April. And then if you want to read from your new book after me, new book, that's coming out in a year's time the year will fly by and you'll be all public life you won't have any private.

Okay.

So this is a poem. This is about, the poems and the prose in Born Between Crosses is about the working lives of rural women. But it's also about everything that goes along with that. This poem is about a girl who has to leave her rural village on the moor in order to kind of come back.

She wants to go away, much like yourself actually, going away for some education. And she knows she will come back. She hopes she will come back. But it's that moment of standing at the crossroads kind of waiting to leave.

It's called Just A Girl.

The moors in winter was no place for a thinker, she said, just a girl with dreams that stretched further than heaven, the boggy earth beneath her feet.
The granite bone that weighed her down, sitting out in the crossroads,
not a child, but still no movement more than not quite grown.
Small thing, her age irrelevant, always the last to be put to task,
just a girl surplus to the world, set straight on some distant path.

And in her head, the wonder that was in her, sorting the wheat from the chaff,
unquenchable fire, like a thirst, those that were happy to live out their lines
on the moor and those who would not.

No place for a dreamer, she was the insignificant girl with the perception
set in the task of any book, any page to read, to write, to imagine more than
the stubborn horizon Backcountry, at her age was no place for rage, her anger
about the injustice of so many things, old ways, the women cooking, cleaning,
living, pin-money, and the men with their one dimension, just work, the heath was
no safe place, for big dreams, small thinking it crept in three colours,
black night, bright summer, and a grey shade of winter, the indifferent sky
and the tors with their heads in the clouds, low and oblivious to the burden
of decision made the young women with dreams in our own hands, coach ticket,
and the letter that read acceptance, small thing, but to a girl who had nothing,
her fate was sacred like a relic dug out from heritage earth, the gift of study
and the wilderness of some unknown city flashing neon and the lights up close that
turn toward just a girl standing in the road, sticks out her thumb remembers to
leave a little of herself in the ground, a navigational compass, so she might return
for home for heart, but not right now.

Tanya Shadrick: I got tears in my eyes because that's the voice I don't hear enough that you knew something by going away And sometimes, you know, I genuinely think I would have...in the natural order of things, my granddad would not have died the year before I was born. And the family farm would not have gone wholesale to my uncle. Cause my dad was clever, clever with his hands. He was told he could be a mechanic. I think I wanted the life my paternal grandmother had, I wanted to just live on a farm. And I think a lot of my life has been trying to find a way in this life. Post-education to have both the life of the hands and the seasons while living in now a middle class, south eastern, it's been the work of a second life actually, but there's so many lines in that that have brought tears to my eyes. You know, that the idea of the men and their one dimension of work, it's both wonderful to be that clear in your identity and so narrow as well.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah. And sometimes when you're a worker and you know, a man who's working or owns a farm or runs a farm or is a tenant farmer. It's about work and they don't have the privilege of anything more like that's it. They just have to do the work and then they're eating, sleeping, and that's it.

Tanya Shadrick: And I'm just beginning now, my husband spent Christmas cause I had a nasty thing that happened on Twitter about nature writing, and people began to offer me support behind the scenes. People I wasn't actually connected to. One of them was James Rebanks, who obviously, you know, his book about being a shepherd, became a bestselling thing here and both overseas and sent me some really lovely long messages of support.

So I've had one negative encounter in the nature writing community and many more positive ones. So lots of these white middle-class male writers in the nature were right there for me, James is a different background. Again, he has that very secure and that's what his books are about that really secure, inherited identity. And his books really celebrate that and explain what it means. Yeah, and that just wasn't something I lived in a rural remote place, but I had none of the skills and no ownership of what was around me. And so the bit I'm going to read from actually, I tried to pick something which I thought spoke to that sense that it's not this bucolic rural existence. I loved where I grew up, but it was also, there was no choice anyway, and there were a lot of restrictions. So and I really like how you've done it. Should I read a little bit now? Yeah? Okay.

So the way the book, *The Cure For Sleep* starts, it obviously starts with you know, my near death, which really brings my whole life, it's one that is a classic threshold moment and it actually does happen across a doorway. I have a sudden haemorrhage. And so that's the very beginning of the book. And then I'm told that I am about to die. I'm taken away from my husband. And I'm told that they're going to try really hard to save my life, but it's been going on too long. So I really think I have my last minute of life. And then part two of the book is like a digested childhood. Cause it's like, I really did experience that thing where I say it didn't flash before my eyes. It was like a quilt. I held it to the light to study its rips and repairs and its patterns. So the second part of the book is like a long flashback. But it's because I genuinely had this strange out-of-time time to think about what life had gone like, so this is from the very beginning of part two, it's called *Bedtime Stories*. And I don't think it'll be too long. Okay.

Bedtime stories.

Where does it begin, the turn away from risk and adventure that so many of us make? That has us cleave to ease, routine, disguise, conformity? If the events which wake us are often shocking and singular, what leads to sleep of soul and possibility is harder to trace. We have to go back through all the stories told to us (or by us) about the world and its workings: that bramble thicket in which we lost our will, our way. I came to consciousness, fiercely awake: destructively so, mother told me my refusal to go quiet at night, (unless laid naked on her chest) being a reason my father left us for a woman in the town below. How it was to be she and me alone in a last detached bungalow of a tiny settlement on a lampless lane that faced onto an unheading horizon of field after distant field frigid, frightening. A time of high alert in which I began to understand not only my own rickety position, but what poor fortunate it was to have been born a girl at all. Without a television and only able to afford a little electricity, we'd watch the kitchen window at dusk and go up the cold hallway together before darkness came, bolting the hollow bedroom door behind us. In winter when it was often too early for either of us to be ready for rest, mother drank, strong cough mixture to make her drowsy, while I age two, three, four, five, six, kept guard rigid and wakeful beside her. The black of country night, pricked white in my eyes and noise from the fields pressing in on us had my blood sludge with worry: the cough of a cow was always a man outside the thin windowpane; a fox making its nightly rounds was a burglar trying latches. Too scared to open the door until daylight, we took a bucket with us in case we needed to pee before morning. I had a way of playing with mother's heavy black hair that soothed her and this was my job each evening to take a small soft strand between my fingers and stroke it to a precise rhythm, picking up, letting it fall while she went on til sleep with the only tale that interested her to tell and me, to hear. What There Had Been That Was Lost: a thousand and one stories that taught me the tangled roots of grownups and mine in particular. And I just need to read a bit more. Once upon a time, there was my mother and her mother and hers before that. Née Dunn, née Stevens, née Crowell. Which meant their born name got from the man that was their father, whether he lived or died or stayed or went. But it was still something to know those girlhood names before they married into another family and I should learn them by heart, nor should I forget that whatever they wanted was not in the end possible.

And then I tell the stories of the women in both of my lines.

Natasha Carthew: That's absolutely brilliant. Yeah, absolutely brilliant.

Tanya Shadrick: It's the first time I've read aloud.

Natasha Carthew: So good. And also, yeah, you put your voice and your accent just absolute suits it. You're going to be really busy once that book is out. Because people are going to want to see you live reading that as well. So good.

Tanya Shadrack: Yeah. It means a lot to me to have read that today. It's lovely.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, absolutely. And I wouldn't, I don't say that to many people either, but yeah, you are one of my favourite writers, so I cannot wait.

Tanya Shadrack: Yeah. That's what I feel, it wasn't just the one, you know, this is the thing, it's your voice. And it's how you read, you know, I've been listening to Kerri ní Dochartaigh. She's a friend of mine we've only met in person once. And her first book is out this week, as we both know, and she's been, you know, Kirsty Wark has been interviewing her and to hear her voice, as well as her words, it's really powerful. It makes us realise how thirsty we are, and it doesn't have to be our own experience. This is the thing I'm just hungry for true variety of different perspectives to my own, or to the ones that were available to me growing up.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah. That's so important. Kerri is a brilliant writer and nature writer and working-class background, she's from Derry. So she's got the gorgeous Derry accent as well. But yeah, she's a rare breed because she writes from the heart and she writes from personal experience, but, and that's, it's all stitched in the, you know, the nature. It doesn't have to be countryside and it doesn't have to be, you know, birds and trees, of course all that. But it's about people who come from cities as well isn't it?

And that for me, leading on to the working-class nature writing prize is, that's what it's all about.

It's writers like Kerri, it's writers like people from cities who write about the small things, as well as the big things, cause nature is everywhere and it's not just about rural countryside it's about the towns, it's about the cities and it's about those grey areas in between. I'm always interested in like the train tracks and the discarded buildings and where there used to be industry. And it's those places as well. That's all nature. So yeah.

Tanya Shadrack: Yeah, I was going to say, so I've not spoken to her, like, you know, you and I have met in person, but we've exchanged a lot of direct messages. So it's like, Josie George, another person with a new book out this month. And you know, it's called A Still Life because as you know, she's kind of got chronic ill health, so she can barely leave her house and only then on a mobility scooter to her community, but there's a lovely bit, and her book is a diary of a year in what would be by most people consider and it is, it's a very small and bounded life, and yet she lives it so intensely. Like how Emily Dickinson and, you know, she's got this lovely, it's full of lovely passages, but she's got this lovely passage where she gets one day on the mobility scooter to the nearby graveyard. Cause she lives I think, you know, I don't know exactly which town, but it's in the North in an ex industrial area and she's in a small, terraced house. And so the graveyard, the cemetery is the nearest bit of kind of open green space she can get to, she's got this lovely description of being there and getting something from it.

And then yeah, some younger people disrupting the peace, but then her kind of absorbing that and going that is my nature. This is what's here. And it's lovely watching that sensibility at work. Some of the making meaning from what's available is really important.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, that's what I've been talking to a lot of people during this last year is... locked down you can still, even if you're in a window, you can still look out the window. You can still see the stars. You can still find a weed growing out of your windowsill. And you know you can write about these small things, as hard as it might be. So, yeah, that's why the nature writing prize for me is about opening up the accessibility and talking about all people who can write from all different backgrounds within the working-class umbrella, because there's not enough women writing nature

writing. There's not enough black people, Asian people. There's not enough of anyone. And as you say, it's very much white middle-class men, which is absolutely fine. And some of them are absolutely incredible nature writers, but it's still opening up the accessibility for everyone. So everyone's voices can be heard and it's those people in the towns. It's the people in the cities. It's people in mobility scooters, driving through graveyards absolutely.

Yeah, that's really what it means to me it's about opening up the accessibility. So if I just speak a little bit about the prize, because we're launching it today at Ilkley, which is brilliant.

The Nature Writing Prize for working class writers I set up last year and we had hundreds and hundreds of entries. So absolutely for the first year it was brilliant. And part of the prize is to win a collection of books by Little Toller, which are absolutely brilliant nature writers. Well, the bookshop as well, actually. And they've suggested the winner can go down to the bookshop and pick the books that they like as well. So it doesn't have to be Little Toller, it can be ours, it could be anyone. Yeah, so that's really brilliant. The other part of the prize is publication and in the Countryman magazine, which we also had last year, which is brilliant. It's free to enter, which I think is really important.

We're still building on the prize. So we're going to add some more things to the prize over the next couple of months, but Little Toller, the Countryman is great kudos for the prize. And yeah, the closing date is 7th of June. So that's really important for people to know. And they can send work over. It can be up to a thousand words. And what I'm really interested in, it's not just doesn't have to be nature writing. It could be fiction. It could be poetry, it can be nonfiction, it can be absolutely everything travel log. It can be a hybrid of all of it.

You know, for me, especially with my new book *Born Between Crosses*, it's a hybrid of poetry and prose and nonfiction. And why not? I don't see a problem with that. So I want the prize to just really open up their imaginations and get out in the wild and write for the prize. And if anyone wants to contact me at Natasha Carthew on Twitter, you know me very well from over there. That's the best place to talk about it and to find out more about the prize, but what does it mean to you, Tanya, as a nature writer, working class nature writer, do you think, how important do you think it is?

Tanya Shadrick: I think these kinds of things, so this initiative, Willowherb Review, which is for writers of colour set up by Jessica J. Lee for exactly the same reason as why you've set this up. Just not seeing writers of colour represented in the Wainwright prize. You know, people are really making an effort now to open up communities and it matters, you know, I didn't ever try to get published until this local initiative wanted people to write about their very minute experience of this little town I live in now, suddenly I was like, yeah, I've got something to say about that cause I never leave. I've only ever lived in two small places. It's like, I needed that specific call. Just the idea, I would invest time writing about myself and then try and seek publication that was alien to me.

One of the many good writers I know for whom writing is completely natural was Adam Nicholson. He's a wonderful writer and person. And we have so much in common as two writers, but for him, it was obvious to him when he met me at Charleston festival where I was working in the café and he was next going to be on a program with me at Wealden Literary Festival. So he was like, why you're working in the cafe? And I was like, I need some extra money, but he came to find me and he's like, it's obvious you should write a book of your own. Now you've published *Lynne's*. And for him, it is natural to be published. He still has to invest effort and risk and vulnerability in writing books of his personal experience. He's not immune to difficulty. Neither is Robert Macfarlane or any of the other established male nature writers, but it's not unnatural to imagine himself in print. And it was unnatural for me. I, you know, books are these holy objects and I didn't have very many of them. Therefore, they seem very potent and strange, like made by other hands.

So this is so important and what I love two wonderful people supporting the prize. Little Toller I think are one of the publishers of the most diverse list of short form writing in the country at the moment. You know, Louisa Adjoa Parker, a British Ghanaian black writer based I think in South Devon, her essay for Little Toller that's now led to a book deal with them I believe I've never spoken to her in person yet, but we've exchanged messages. I just got in touch with her like a fan to say, this writing about being black in Devon in a completely white area is extraordinary. It was just beautiful place writing, but it also had a real purpose to it. And then she did the long poem for Little Toller about, you know, speaking to white West Country people. Kerri ní Dochartaigh got her publishing deal as a result of her Little Toller essay for the clearing being so widely shared. You know, Dara McAnulty, it's a real, they've taken work by me. It's such an amazing platform and the Countryman too, you know, and this is what I advise so many emerging writers to do is to look for these really good publications. They can't always offer payment, but they give great editorial support for your first pieces.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, and you know you are part of a bigger family. I was approached by both Little Toller and the Countryman to be a part of this prize, which is testament to where they're coming from. Absolutely.

And the amount of people from last year who said, I had never thought about writing nature writing. I never thought what nature writing, people are really put off by nature writing. So we really are reclaiming the wild for everyone, which is what our talk is about today.

Tanya Shadrick: Yeah. And it's what you said, what really excited me cause I didn't know the nature of the prize until you spoke just then is what you're saying about form and you're actually inviting people to write whatever they need to write, because that's another thing. I think people from a working-class background or underrepresented backgrounds, we can worry too much about assuming the right voice or the right form. And actually, that's not where our talent and our stories are going to show by doing the mile of writing. I was able to build in all my grandmother's stories and like almost knit and weave them. That's where I discovered my voice.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah. Yep. Spot on. Absolutely. So what's next for you? Your new book is out Cure For Sleep is out in February? Yeah. And are you editing anything now? Or are you working on something new or you're just relaxing for a little while?

Tanya Shadrick: No. So I'm using, I've never seen a book of my own through a publishing house before. So it's with Weidenfeld & Nicolson so I've got this wonderful editor, so I don't quite know when they're going to need me, so I'm not able to take on any new, big paid projects. So I'm giving my time away basically, because I'm being paid a good amount to write this book.

I mean, it's amazing. I'm on advance.

So starting tonight, I'm giving an hour a day for two weeks solid to people. They're not people I'm connected to before online, I just did an open call and I'm going to do that between edits all year. Just give away my time because I get paid well for writing and it's important to talk. That's what I was thinking about earlier is that thing of money is a whole separate conversation. There's finding a voice, there's maintaining a practice, there's seeking publication and contact. Then there's the getting paid and knowing how to get paid. And I'm happy to speak to anybody. In a one-off conversation about what I charge and who pays me and how I negotiated payment when it wasn't offered, this is all part of how I can now afford to be a writer for the next few years.

It's not a hobby. It's not some, I don't have to fill my time with paid work. Other paid work. I may well have to in a couple of years, but right now I am paid fully to be a writer and it's joyous and I want to help as many other people into that place as possible. And I know you feel the same.

Natasha Carthew: Yeah, absolutely. I mean that's what we have in common as well. We're very generous with our time and energy to other people and that's probably because of our backgrounds, I would say. You know, we are delighted with where we are in whatever level we are in our career, and we want to share what we can to help others. And that's really what comes through from talking to you today, Tanya. So thank you for joining me at Ilkley Literature Festival. It's been absolutely brilliant, and I will see you very soon at plenty of festivals, especially next year, and also at Class Festival in October.

Tanya Shadrick: Absolutely, I'm really looking forward to it.

Natasha Carthew: Okay.

Tanya Shadrick: Thank you.

Natasha Carthew: Bye.