

Close Talking Episode #118

“The Altar” by Humberto Ak’abal

Friday January 22, 2021

<https://soundcloud.com/close-talking/episode-118-the-altar-humberto-akabal>

Show Notes

Jack 0:08

Hello and welcome to Close Talking the world's most popular poetry analysis podcast from Cardboard Box Productions Incorporated. I am co-host Jack Rossiter-Munley and with my good friend Connor McNamara Stratton we read a poem,

Connor 0:21

talk about the poem,

Jack 0:23

and read the poem again.

Connor 0:25

Before we get into today's selection, a quick note that if you like what we do here Close Talking and have a spare minute of your time, it would mean the world to us if you would give the podcast a rating and review on Apple podcasts.

Jack 0:40

Those ratings and reviews help boost us up the algorithm and find new listeners.

Connor 0:44

And if you have suggestions for future episodes or comments on this one, you can send us an email at closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com.

Jack 0:53

And you can also find us on social media, on Twitter, the show is @closetalking, I am @jackrossitermin, and Connor is @connormstratton. On Instagram, the show is @closetalkingpoetry, and on Facebook, it's [facebook.com/closetalking](https://www.facebook.com/closetalking). We also have a website closetalking.com where you can find all the past episodes of the show. And Cardboard Box Productions has just launched a newsletter UNBOXED and if you go to cardboardboxproductionsinc.com you can subscribe for more behind the scenes stuff on Close Talking, and all of the other literary and cultural history podcast at Cardboard Box Productions makes. On with the show. Hello, and welcome to an all new episode of Close Talking. I'm your co-host Jack Rossiter-Munley.

Connor 1:44

And I am your other co-host Connor McNamara Stratton

Jack 1:47

And today we are here to do what we always do, which is read a poem talk about the poem and read the poem again. Today's poem is "The Altar" by Humberto Ak'abal, it's a pretty short poem. And I think it might even be categorized as deceptively simple. And I'm very excited to dig into it, because I have really enjoyed the poetry of Humberto Ak'abal. And I've been thinking a lot about Guatemala. And also just a few short days after this episode goes live, on January the 28th, it will be the two year anniversary of his passing. So it seems like a particularly fitting time to revisit one of his poems. I think the most important note before we actually like read it and dive in is that we are reading it and talking about it in it's English translation. And he primarily worked not in English, but in the Mayan language K'iche' or in Spanish. And he would often write in K'i che' and translate into Spanish and there have been a number of English translations of his work by various translators. I do not know the specific translator of this piece. But one of the reasons I selected it is because it's one of the poems that is available on his official website. And there on the website, the poems are presented in all three languages. And I encourage everyone listening to go to the website, to read in all the languages, and to read some of his other poems. And because he is a really incredible poet, he's from Guatemala, he is sort of one of the most globally prominent Mayan writers. He's gotten a number of different awards, probably for like, a, like an English speaking audience or for like classical poetry audience, the fact that he was a Guggenheim Fellowship recipient in 2006, is probably one of the highest and most recognizable honors, but he's got international recognition, such as being a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters from the French Ministry of Culture amongst a number of other awards that spanned several decades, during which his work was, was recognized. He was born in 1952. And so his life kind of traces the contemporary political turmoil in Guatemala, the civil war that stretched basically from like the mid 50s, to the mid 90s. Before that, there were about 10 years of revolution and other types of unrest, which I think we'll talk about a little bit over the course of this episode. But the fact that he was sort of living through all of that, and, you know, ended up becoming an ambassador to a lot of the world about contemporary Mayan and indigenous culture in Guatemala and beyond Guatemala is sort of notable, I think, just in terms of situating his work in time, if nothing else.

Connor 4:59

Let's dive in.

Jack 5:00

Sounds good. This is

"The Altar" by Humberto Ak'abal

The shadows

Light their candles.

The night
Is the altar,

the silence
is the prayer.

And just moments
before dawn,

with one little breath
the wind puts them out.

And that's the whole poem.

Connor 5:27
Yeah.

Jack 5:28

I was personally fascinated reading through this. And I know we normally do a little narrative, and I'll be interested to hear what you, what your take on what that narrative might be is. But there are some fairly basic building blocks here that are all put into, like, interesting relationships with each other, that end up by the end of the poem being like redefined and reorganized in ways that make me wonder about, like, what each of them is actually all about. So you have the shadows and the candles, and this idea of like, light, and then the concept of the night, and the altar, which is the title of the poem. And then by the end, you have the wind, putting out the light, but the light was lit by shadows. So is the sun rising with the dawn how do light wind shadows, and candles all interact on this altar? I don't know. But I like that this poem is so short, has all of that, and can keep me guessing and wondering about how all this comes together. So that was like my initial reaction to reading it.

Connor 6:43

Yeah, oh, my god, totally. No, I, I feel like I'm, I'm really coming at this as a yeah, I am, like, in a very, some, some poems, I feel like, I already have a good understanding of many parts of the poems just after, like, a first read or something. But this one, both just in terms of like, the poem itself, and also, you know, like, being, like, you know, much less familiar with, you know, Maya poetry, Ak'abal's work. So, it'll be, it's, it's, it's exciting in that I like, feel like it's such new terrain, for me to be exploring. But yeah, it's, it's very kind of, I mean, one direction I go with it, sort of initially is like, you know, there's, I do feel like there's a kind of the poem as a kind of, you know, well, it's interesting, because silence is the prayer in the poem. But the poem acts as it as a sort of meditative moment, where, you know, it's like creating this image with like, one little action, right? Where you have the shadows lighting the candles, and then you have this sort of description of a scene. And then you have the, the little breath with the wind, putting out the you know, so like, the whole narrative happening is just, candles are lit, candles go out. Which is lovely, but the and and everything is kind of like, it's such a it's like a pure metaphor,

kind of poem where, like, you know, the night is the altar, the silence is the prayer. Those are such kind of like, you know, metaphor is like that equation of like, this is this. But it's, it's yeah, but then there's these like, you know, how did the shadows light the candles? Right, it's a great question.

Jack 9:30

It's interesting, because it's this immediate reversal, right where you would normally shadows only exist because there is light, you light a candle or you turn a light on and then shadows are cast as a result. But here, the shadows light their candles. The shadows are the ones that have the agency. They in fact, own the candles. The candles belong to the shadows of the darkness and then immediately followed by "The night / is the altar". So there is like this vaunted position to the darkness, and to the stillness of nighttime. Which is really kind of an interesting way to begin it. And yeah, as you're saying, basically, there's some candles, and then they go out. But like, framing it with that reversal of what is the night and altar too, becomes the implicit question to me and like, does the darkness and the night become the altar to the day, to something else? Is it this time when it is dark and silent? Is that the meditative reflective prayerful time when you can, in, I guess, give praise to the day and what it brings? But at the end, even if, if that is a reading that you go with, at the end, you're then left still with this sense of kind of quiet loss when the wind puts out these little candles in that on the altar of night, you know? Or is it just the night is so vast compared to these little candles like night as this immense darkness, that the candles can only ever exist as like, small lights on an altar when you're dealing with night? I don't know.

Connor 11:36

Yeah, one so one thing that that I think about a little bit with this poem, is this idea of which, which I feel like we've talked about in some other episodes, but like, the idea of the present absence, and I think that stepping far away from the poem for a second, it's a little hard to talk about, or think about, or engage the things that aren't there in a very literal way. Right? It's like, you know, what is the not this basically. And, you know, in certain, you know, in certain senses you have, you know, if it's the absence of a person, you know, we have things like ghosts or hauntings that kind of are embodiments of those absences. But I think there's like such, there's, there's something - and I need to think more about it but there's something very powerful in like an everyday human way, about the things that aren't around us. And it's often very difficult, obviously, to capture that stuff. And like, one thing that this poem does, and I think, is a thing that a lot of poems, I think are especially good at doing is through this kind of metaphor, and through the way that the poem is like inverting and reversing some things that are intuitive, it creates the app, it makes an absence feel like it's there, like it's present. That like the silence is the prayer. Like,

Jack 13:46

Hmm, that's such a good point.

Connor 13:48

And again, this is like going away from the poem. But like, when I think about, you know, there are some, there's the, there's an end of Wallace Stevens poem, "The Snow Man," where the poem ends, like, one must have a mind of winter, and be cold, a very long time or something, to know the I think it's the silence, that is and the silence that is not or something or like the silence that is there and the silence that is not there. And then there's like times in my life where either someone not saying something, or someone trying to say something, but failing or like, you know, if you're at a, you know, like a wedding or a funeral or something like that, and there's kind of like the moment of silence, where you kind of like feel the silence as a kind of thing rather than like because another way about silence could just be like everything that is not the sound that was happening. But rather, it's like these kinds of these like, you know, like the pregnant pause, or whatever is kind of cliché phrase that's kind of come to approximate that where it's full of something even though it's, it's, it's the absence of it. And, and then similarly, you know, "The night / is the altar," and an altar is, is an interesting thing in its own right, where it's this kind of physical construction of a space that that is supposed to provide access to something that's not there, like, whether it's an altar to a God, or it's like an altar to, you know, a person who's passed away or something, where there's kind of like, you know, it's it's like the sort of portal or something. And have the night the that yeah, I don't know, it's, it's again, it's like, you know, is there's kind of like an often people, that the tension between light and dark is sort of endlessly played with but like, you know, is that the kind of like, first stanza "The shadows / light their candles" plays with that tension, where it's like, is, light the absence of darkness? Or is darkness the absence of light? Or, like, what is the thing that is then being removed? And of course, like, shadows are sort of interesting, because they, they block the light from getting through. So it's, but in, you know, in doing so, they shape the thing that is being that is doing the blocking, so you have a shadow of a candle, it's the shape of the candle, and that actually gives it, that makes the candle present in a way that it wasn't before. Yeah, I don't know.

Jack 17:28

No, I think all of that is right on and it's very much in line with how I was thinking about this poem. And I really like your example of like, a moment of silence, whether it's at a wedding or at any other sort of ceremony, and I feel like the question that this poem is posing is, is it all of the ceremony that gives meaning to that experience? Or is it that one silent moment in the middle of it? Is that where the real meaning is coming from? And it's exactly what you're talking about. Is it that candles light up the dark? Or is it that the dark carves out space for light? It's very interesting to then think through a lot of different practices in the world through that lens of like, religious services. Is it the, you know, the carving out of that quiet, sacred space that gives form to the rest of the world? Is that where meaning is really created? Is that space, the altar to do you know, in terms of thinking of an altar as exactly what you're saying, it's this conduit to divinity in a lot of cases, or it's like a reverential space, or it's an honorary space where you're honoring those who are departed, often, lighting candles, and placing them on an altar is sort of a version of, you know, memorialization. Or when you when you light a prayer candle on an altar for someone who has passed away or for someone who's in distress, even liberal religions, like Unitarian Universalism, do versions of that it's a pretty broad practice, is creating those small spaces for meaning, where you can go and do prayerful and quiet,

sometimes even silent acts is the creation of those alters in spaces what then gives shape to everything around them, as opposed to, you know, some other bigger noisier form of meaning making or more you know, as you were saying, in terms of presence of absence, a more present form of ostentatious kind of loud. I don't know what you want to call it, communion or celebratory action, like the difference between a carnival and church as a way of like celebrating or making meaning or doing something as a collective to honor either a harvest day or someone's passing, you know, what are the differences there? What about them, creates it and very often I think you can extrapolate out that it is these small moments that are so different, whether they're quiet or loud, that then give shape and meaning to the rest of the world. I think, as I'm thinking about that now, that feels to me like a lot of what the like response to the Coronavirus has been about for on people's personal life level, which is when every day feels the same. When something like the holidays comes around, whatever holidays you're celebrating, they don't look like what they used to but at least it is like a way of marking time. And like this is this feels different. So you can go through the winter holidays, or maybe Valentine's Day will be a bigger deal because it's like an excuse to mark that like, hey, you know, it's different. It's not like, well, Thursday feels like Saturday feels like Wednesday. I feel like those kind of ritualized markings of time, and the ritualized, communal creation of meaning is something that has definitely been missing. And I think that this poem is definitely thematically interested in that. Yeah, I hadn't thought of that in quite that way. I'm going to be thinking about that a lot more.

Connor 21:12

Yeah. And it makes the end so interesting. Because it's like, just "moments / before dawn, / with one little breath / the wind puts them out." So it's, like the removing of the removing kind of thing. It's so so yeah, deceptively simple is is is right on. Yeah, I don't know. It's, it's like an interesting thing place to sit with. It's like, where where do we end up at the end of the poem. I mean, I suppose we're like leaving the altar basically, in a literal way, where, you know, the wind is the agent of day putting out the candles, and as dawn happens.

Jack 22:11

Which is sort of interesting in itself, because you'd think the agent of daytime and dawn would be like, the sun. I would sort of even in the context of the poem, it would sort of work because that would eliminate the shadows that lit the candles, even if the candles are still lit, if everything is lit, it kind of negates what they're doing. So the choice of wind is something that I that really struck me when I was first reading through it, and I think calling it a little breath also just draws attention to how like, fleeting and ephemeral these quiet moments or these quiet sort of experiences can be, like, the littlest thing can disrupt them and often in any ceremonial context, so much of what's going on, kind of is about getting to that point of meaning. And sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't, but so much has to go right for it to really, really work. And the littlest breath of wind can put can put it out.

Connor 23:14

Yeah, no, that's really right. That's really right. It's It's It's always in a fragile state. It's interesting I have the the kind of the poem in the Spanish and the K'iche' up on his website and I've it's it's I

was surprised a little bit that I don't know I mean, I don't really know either language but the the Spanish to the English is seems pretty direct. You know, "altar" and then like, you know, those lines "La noche / es el altar," like, yeah, "es el altar." "The night is the altar." "el silencio / la oracion" - the silence / is the prayer." "Y un poquito" – "And just moments" and "antes del amanecer," – "before dawn," which obviously my Spanish pronunciation is abominable. And then in the, you know, I'm not sure but it looks like it's also fairly direct from the K'iche' to the Spanish. It's interesting in that, you know, like, there there are other elements of the poem in the English like the slow pacing, you know, and the the kind of direct one to ones and, you know, the brevity, which in some translations, I would be like, well, I'm not really sure how much to read into that because it's like, you don't you don't know if those are felt in the original languages at all. But it does it does feel like there is those elements. Certainly I think in Spanish, there's there's little action, it's slowly paced. It's simple deliberately, in terms of the construction of the sentences, you know.

Jack 25:29

Yeah, the word choice and the sentence construction are so straightforward that I was also struck by that reading through on the website. Because yeah, I only sort of know Spanish but reading through it, it was such a clear one to one, which is, which makes it so interesting that the poem can still have so much sort of thematic and conceptual depth to it when it is that direct, and that kind of simple on a language level. And also, it's so short, I mean, it's ten lines, broken into five couplets and three sentences. The first couplet is a sentence. And then the next two are a sentence. And then the last two are a sentence. And each couplet ends with either a period or a comma. And that's about it. And yet, it's it's so vast, it is as vast as the altar of night that it contemplates. Which I really enjoy.

Connor 26:35

Yeah, I yeah, me too. And, you know, it's, it's interesting, I was sort of just reading, also more about Ak'abal, and as someone who, you know, like a white guy in the States, like, I am wary of, of drawing too much too many conclusions from my cursory readings about him to this poem, specifically, but nevertheless, it's, it's, it's interesting to know more about the context in which he was living. K'iche' Maya people are, I believe, the largest Maya group in Guatemala, and maybe of, of Maya peoples generally. I think there's at least a million in Guatemala. The Civil War, which, you know, like, was a, you know, backed by the US and the CIA and was, or the coup that kind of catapulted it. And it was really 36 years, like, so many casualties. And I believe the vast majority of those deaths were indigenous, Maya people. And, you know, even after the Civil War, there's a really interesting moment that I came across, where, in 2003 he was awarded, like Guatemala's National Prize for Literature, which seems to be kind of like an equivalent Pulitzer or something like that. And he rejected the award, because it was named after the Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias, and Asturias was, like, he he wrote a thesis entitled, "The Social Problem of the Indian," which sort of gives you much of what you need to know. And, you know, he was interviewed, Ak'abal was interviewed by the BBC after he rejected the award, and, and talked about how Asturias sort of offensively talked about the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. And sort of because of that, you know, he didn't want to accept an award that was named after him. And, you know, it and that was in 2003. And, you

know, it's, it's, the interview is quite funny. Yeah, anyway, we'll post a link to it. But it's, it's an interesting, I think, like, there was another article that I found, and these are just sort of samplings of things about him that I that I thought were were helpful in giving me some some context. But like, there's a, there was a really interesting piece in the Asymptote Journal that was about Ak'abal. And you know, just like his life was, you know, very, like, you know, he, he stopped formal school as a young child, he worked as a weaver and a shepherd. And then he moved to Guatemala City. And, you know, and even his moving between K'iche' and Spanish, you know, embodies this kind of tension between, like, his, his indigenous identity and the fact that, you know, Guatemala it's, it's like this complicated thing in the States where it's like that, and having the English to Spanish to K'iche' is such a, because it's like, Guatemala is already a colonial state, you know, with, you know, Spanish conquest, many hundreds of years ago. And then English is like another, like, step of domination in, in a way where, and, you know, there are parts of these essays, like, you know, it would, it would be remiss not to mention the profound impact that racism had on Ak'abal's life and career. Most of his work was in Spanish, due to the fact that, like, most indigenous poets of his generation, learning to read or write in his mother tongue, K'iche', was never part of his formal schooling. And, you know, some of his books, which, you know, like, is one of his bilingual books, there's, like few copies of it, you know, in libraries around the world. And I just sort of, I just kind of bring it up, just because I don't know exactly if it has any bearing on this particular poem. But, and I don't want to, like impose five incredibly crude generalizations onto it. But it is a poem that sort of doesn't have overtly necessarily like you know political resonances, it could be read by which is in part some of it's strengths, some of it's strengths, where it's it's I could encounter this poem and be moved and kind of intrigued by it in a lot of different ways that don't require me to have specific historical knowledge of what's going on in Guatemala. But at the same time, I don't want to like, flatten those contours of, of his life in his work. I don't really know where that's going. But I just I found those sort of pieces of information about him and about Guatemala, generally. And K'iche' people to be really interesting. I don't know, it's like, it's also like, remarkable. And, you know, amazing how prominent he became, in many different ways without kind of it seems like he he didn't sort of sell anything out or.

Jack 34:13

That's really right. And I think that that context is important and does lend even if there is not necessarily a, you know, as you were saying, a super, like top level political reading of the poem, not that there has to be or that there should be. But I do think that that historical context does add another layer, as you're reading through it, and as your understanding sort of, who is giving me this piece about shadows and night and sacred spaces and quiet moments, and what does it mean to them? Because, yeah, I mean, the quick gloss history of like, contemporary Guatemala is basically in the 40s and 50s, there was a revolution and there was the first democratically elected president and he then had a successor who was very slightly more liberal than he was, neither one of them would be strikingly liberal. But after decades and decades and decades previously of having these very sympathetic dictators sympathetic to like US interests, basically both monetary and like, quote unquote, security interests. This then became like a crisis for Monroe Doctrine, interested business folk and high-level political figures in the United States. And so in the mid 50s, they overthrew this very slightly more liberal

successor to the first democratic president, whose major like trespass, was to put in place land reforms that like really freaked them out that he might be sympathetic to communists, when in reality, it would be totally in line with basically a Jeffersonian ideal of democracy based around an agrarian society as opposed to an industrial one would be to like, democratize access to land. But that's like a whole other issue. Anyway, the US does a coup, and it basically just creates decades and decades of civil war and unrest that did not end until 1996, when various guerrilla groups finally, like, made peace with the, with the government. And in fact, after the coup, there was an operation by the US government called PB History that entirely existed to create or to find rationales for the coup, and it never found a connection to the Soviet Union or creeping communism. In an eerie echo of perhaps like the war in Iraq around weapons of mass destruction. It never materialized.

Connor 36:50
Yikes

Jack 36:51

The the connection was never found. And also just like the centrality of Guatemala to the Mayan Empire back when it was the main sort of political and cultural force in Central America, Tikal, which was like the Mayan capital, twice the size of Manhattan and has like about 100,000 people live there at its peak, making it one of the largest cities in the ancient world, was located in Guatemala and Teotihuacan for like ancient cities in Mexico, and Central America tends to get most of the notice, because it's like near Mexico City today. But Tikal was just as big, it was just, you know, a few 100 miles farther south. And so in terms of just being like, a truly significant world, historical and culturally important place. And the way that having a writer like Ak'abal, who is writing and K'iche', who is not only bringing that history into the present, and keeping the language alive, but also adding new layers to it is like a really interesting and important part of his legacy. And there's a lot of work being done right now to help keep K'iche' alive and keep indigenous culture alive in Central American countries. Which is, is really like a really cool thing to see so much attention being brought to, to that. And I think if you wanted to, you could probably squint your eyes, and you could have a pretty political reading of this poem where like, how many altars had to be made in the night with small candles on them to commemorate the losses from the Civil War, or from any of the other sort of extrajudicial killings, there are many, many atrocities committed as a result of the civil war that was ongoing. I think you could also read the end where one little "with one little breath / the wind puts them out" these like, these very small candles, literally little, are not literally little, but you get the sense that these candles are small and fleeting, over the course of the poem. I think you could see that as sort of this like, hope for something better politically, or just in the in living in a country without fear. And they are candles that are so meager, it's not even their light that shines, it is just the absence of darkness. That's how sort of meager they are. And even that is, is blown out by one little breath of wind, which could be a few 100 US backed commandos coming into your country and overthrowing the government, and leading to like 30 years of mass killings and, and horror, so I don't necessarily see that as my own reading of the poem, but I think you could find those layers in there.

Connor 39:54

Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah, and I think yeah, it's that's really that's really interesting. And it just makes me think too like, it brings me back to like, the original, just thoughts of the shadows and the candles of of like, this is a this was another like piece that I found more like scholarly article on on Ak'abal. And it kind of is talks about a lot of things, and not this poem specifically. But one of the points of the piece is about how, you know, there are, you know, contradictions, and like many kinds of voices. And like those sorts of complexities, and many things like coming together, specifically in Ak'abal often is embodied in the form of weaving, which is like kind of the focus of this article, and not necessarily the poem, but like, those are, especially when you have these contesting histories and identities of being K'iche', being Maya, being indigenous, but being Guatemalan, etc, like, making sort of, like space for those contradictions to sit. That's one of the beauties of this poem. And like kind of powers of it is like, the shadows light their candles, there's so much in there already. Where like, it's like, "the shadows, light their own candles." But then yeah, but then you have all the tensions and like contradictions that we talked about with light and darkness and stuff. And the President absences and stuff and all that history, and the night is the altar. And yeah, I totally, I totally agree that there's this fragility and fleetingness of it. But at the same time, there is such, the poem kind of takes this very small happening, of like, some candles in the night, and like imbues it with this sort of intense spiritual presence. And it does it in this way that is both simple and complex at the same time, you know, it's, it's like "The night / is the altar, / the silence / is the prayer" like, easy to say. But then when you kind of sit with it, it's like, there's a lot contained in it, and a lot of contradictions in kind of like, you know, interwoven complexities and stuff.

Jack 42:46

Yeah, it's not, you know, literal, or particularly explicit, but it really is that kind of weaving that you're talking about with concepts like light and dark silence and sound that you really do feel in this poem so strongly. Shall we read it again?

Connor 43:03

I think you should read it again.

Jack 43:06

Alright. This is

"The Altar" by Humberto Ak'abal

The shadows
Light their candles.

The night
Is the altar,

the silence
is the prayer.

And just moments
before dawn,

with one little breath
the wind puts them out.

(Close Talking theme music)

What have you been reading? Listening to? Watching?

Connor 43:53

Yes, indeed. Indeed, Jack indeed. Definitely been on a lot of TV. It's been that time to get back into it. You know what I mean? And, and we're watching sort of a crazy show right now. It's pretty fun. I don't know if like I should be right. Well, you know, the show Imposters?

Jack 44:23

Mm hmm.

Connor 44:24

Okay. It's pretty fun. We've been watching this show. And it's like, there's this con woman who basically like has married this guy. And then, you know, after married, basically left him and took all of his money and stuff. And anyway, then he finds out that he was not the only one. And they decide to team up and track her down. And in the process, perhaps they become con artists. So their own twist. It's very campy in a lot of ways. And it walks many different genre lines that are enjoyable to see where it's like kind of a thriller-y. It's also kind of like a buddy sitcom, like vibe, which is sort of weird. It's like, it's like if New Girl was like a, like a crime thriller or something.

Jack 45:45

Like in the like, psych realm, it sounds like?

Connor 45:50

A little bit. Yeah. Yeah, a little bit. Anyway, it's like, we've been watching so many very serious procedural crime dramas. Made in Britain.

Jack 46:09

I mean, your time has been mainlining Luther as I work out, so like,

Connor 46:14

Oh, so good.

Jack 46:16

Yeah, it's happening.

Connor 46:17

Luther is great. And we just, you know, we weren't ready to do the full opposite and go straight to Bridgerton. So we did a happy medium, which still has got the crime vibe. But now the crime people are the good guys. And it's kind of funny in a dumb way. And so yeah, Imposters watch it if you want. Don't if you don't.

Jack 46:47

Good advice, generally in life. Connor, it does sound very much up my alley, though.

Connor 46:53

I think you would like it actually. It's kind of it's in the kind of dark comedy thing that like, happens when certain genres have become established enough. That like, you can kind of follow it even though it's a little intense. But then like, make it funny if that makes sense. Yeah. Connor's ambivalent recommendation.

Jack 47:20

Recommendation with qualifications.

Connor 47:22

There you go. There you go. Yeah, Jack talk to me. What are you what are you watching? What are you reading? What are you listening to?

Jack 47:28

Well, mine's a real downer. But it is on theme with this episode. So I figured I should mention it. But it's it's also about Guatemala. And like, kind of awful things that have happened there. It's called "The Art of the Political Murder," which is a documentary on HBO, it was also a book, I guess I haven't read the book, I assume it's good. The documentary is very good, which is about the murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera, who was a Bishop of the Catholic Church. And he also headed up this major project that looked into human rights abuses that were committed during the Guatemalan Civil War. And just a couple of days after that report came out, so the Civil War ended in '96. He was part of this group that went around interviewing survivors and witnesses to all these atrocities. Their report came out in 1998. And right after it came out, he was murdered. And that's like, awful enough, but to hear the full story of what the investigation than into his murder was like, and just the absolutely horrific and dangerous stuff that went on. For those who were trying to find out what actually happened to him is like a whole story unto itself. And yeah, for anybody who's not familiar with Guatemalan history, for anybody who's interested in the ways that major systemic crimes are committed and covered up even in you know, fairly contemporary times. I think the 90s are still pretty recent. I recommended it - political murder. Yeah, and I'll no, no, you're 100% right. It's still happening now. But yeah, "The Art of the Political Murder" on HBO is very, very good, if difficult viewing, so maybe you need to watch Imposters afterwards to kind of balance it all back out.

Connor 49:45

Palate cleanser?

Jack 49:46

Yeah.

Connor 49:48

I'm gonna check that out. For sure.

(Close Talking theme music)

Jack 50:02

Hello, everybody. Thank you so much for listening. This is co-host Jack Rossiter-Munley, just reminding you that there are a ton of ways that you can get in touch with us and we love to hear from you. It's always great to know if you have a different reading of this poem, or any of the other poems we've covered. Or if there are any poems you wish we would cover in the future. You can send us an email at closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com or the show and Connor and myself are all on Twitter. That's another great way to connect. I am @jackrossitermun, Connor is @connormstratton, and the show is @closetalking. You can also find us on Instagram @closetalkingpoetry or on Facebook at facebook.com/closetalking. See you next time.

(Close Talking theme music)