

In Conversation With Compulsive Reader's Founder – Maggie Ball

[Compulsive Reader](#) has more than 10,000 subscribers, and over 1 million book loving visitors each year. It consistently ranks in the Top 20 Google and Yahoo searches for book reviews. The driving force behind Compulsive Reader is Maggie Ball – Poet, Book Critic, Podcast Interviewer and Producer, Mother of 3, Wife, and Research Support Lead (the day job). She and her poetry have been described as ‘... polished and brave. Intellect melds with emotion to soar,’ *Jan Dean, Author of [Paint Peels Graffiti Sings](#)*, and ‘... an intelligent poet whose writing is charged with imagery and language drawn from the sciences,’ *Linda Ireland*. These are just two amongst many, many exceptional accolades.

Maggie interviewed me on her podcast when [Finding Love Again](#) was launched. I found her a generous, intelligent, interesting, engaging host. I was particularly enthused that she read my book before the interview (I’ve found this to be the exception rather than the rule), and I’m very pleased to learn more about this extraordinary woman to share with you.

Your podcast is littered with great names. Which have been your top 3 most memorable interviewees?

I’ll never forget interviewing [Tom Keneally](#) (just after [Bettany's Book](#) in 2003). He was a joy – so interested in absolutely everything, loquacious and easy to talk to, utterly nice – we went way overtime and I wanted to keep going. That was a transcript though – I wasn’t actually recording the shows at that point. It was pretty early on in my interviewing ‘career’, and I daresay his encouragement was part of why I continued to do it. Another transcribed

interview that I loved doing was the great, Late [Dorothy Porter](#) (interviewed just after [Other Worlds](#) in 2007:). She also was incredibly nice, intelligent and insightful – I felt that if I could only talk to her long enough I might absorb some of her greatness. For the recorded ones – I hate choosing because I pretty much love everyone, but a few that have remained with me and come to mind immediately include [Emily Ballou](#), who came on shortly after [The Darwin Poems](#) were published for the second time, and something about her resonated with me – not just because I loved the book, which I did, but because she had a quality – even a bit ditzy – which was very down-to-earth and appealing. I also am partial to the face-to-face interviews as there are nuances you can't get on the phone – the eye contact, the subtleties of body language etc. [Ben Okri](#), who I interviewed at the Sydney Writers Festival in 2016, was rather wonderful in this respect – plus I got a hug (can't get that over the phone): I know that's four. Also [you](#) (Carolyn Martinez), which makes five :-).

Many writers are introverts, but we all must market our books. Can you offer any tips on how writers can ensure they're a good interviewee?

Lol – that's a whole course! But in brief, it helps to do your homework – know your interviewer and their style (listen to their shows for a bit so you can come in with that knowledge). Always bring your book and be prepared to talk about it – so have a log-line or 'elevator speech' overview ready. Once you're in the conversation, treat the interviewer as if they are a good friend – so respond to their questions with warmth (even if you don't like the question), and respond candidly, openly and feel free to meander a bit. The listeners want to get to know you. The worst interviewee is either hostile or non-communicative. I've never had the former, but I have, once or twice, had an interviewee who basically responded with one word answers. I couldn't use the

interview.

How do authors go about having their book reviewed by Compulsive Reader? I imagine you get far more requests than you can manage.

I'm afraid I do get far more review pitches than I can handle – I only have a small, busy volunteer team and our reviews tend to be pretty thorough as you say – I won't publish a review that just skims the surface, so they take time which limits how many we can do. We publish guidelines on the site (under submissions) and basically the process is to send a few paragraphs of synopsis. A few puffs or existing review blurbs doesn't hurt either. The query should be professional – no typos, really clear writing (sometimes I don't even know what a person is asking for), with the right blend of familiar and professional. They shouldn't beg! (it happens a lot).

Nor should they tell me how much work went into the writing of the book, how long it took, that it was self-published (we don't mind at all, but set up a company and treat your book like a publisher would!), or that you are new at this and hoping to get some feedback (there are places that do that). Don't send the book until I ask for it! Do include a nice looking .pdf press sheet with any relevant backstory, a book cover, and the synopsis/blurbs. Most publishers will create this promo sheet for a new book. Don't ask questions that can be easily found by visiting the site. Always visit the site first and know who you're querying.

With your passion being poetry why are you interviewing and reviewing other writers besides poets?

I choose who I want to interview or review based on my reading tastes rather than my own writing. I do actually also write fiction and nonfiction as well as poetry and I read very widely in a pretty extensive range of genres. Also poetry is a harder sell, so I do get more feels from promoting it than say, from promoting a blockbuster novel that doesn't need

help. Compulsive Reader is very much a passion project – it's not a business for me at all – I'm able to please myself creatively without worrying about things like sales, page hits, etc. It is definitely cross-promotional and complementary (and I know I'm a better writer from reading deeply and talking to other writers), and the perks are pretty good, but mostly, it's something I do because I truly love doing it.

Which of your books of poetry is your favourite?



I'm so humbled and moved by reviews I've received – they keep me writing. I think, poetry is such a hard sell, why do it – and then I think of those reviews and think – well, someone (intelligent and wonderful) has been moved. That's enough.

I'm not entirely sure I have a favourite. In terms of sole-authored, full-length collections, there are actually only two books – [Repulsion Thrust](#) and [Unmaking Atoms](#). There are quite a few chapbooks including about 8 collaborations but those are my two big books. Both cover a lot of ground, and explore different ground (though perhaps there are some similarities – the science inspiration, the ecological focus, the mingling of dark and light), so it's hard to choose one, but If I have to I'll say *Unmaking Atoms* just because it's more recent and as an author you're always trying to go a little further with each book.

Would you care to share with us the proudest moment you've experienced so far in your career?

Maybe, because it was recent, winning the Hunter Writers Centre's Member's Award in the Newcastle Poetry Prize. I know it's not a massive award, but the Newcastle Poetry Prize means a lot to me – I've been entering it for a long time, and I've been a member of the Hunter Writers Centre for a long time too – about 25 years!

What's next for Maggie Ball?

I've got another full-length poetry book ready to go which I'm going to be sending out very soon, and then I'm thinking it's time to go back to the world of fiction for a bit. I have finally decided to move on from my abandoned third novel, and start over.

[Carolyn Martinez](#) is an author, editor and speaker.