



The Corrymeela Podcast – Season 3

Thanks so much for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. You might like to discuss the episode and the accompanying questions with friends, family, or a discussion group, or just use them for your own writing and reflection.

If you're part of a group, be mindful and considerate of one another's willingness to engage in the discussion - leave space for people to keep their reflections to themselves if they want to. You might also want to agree on some general principles to stick to, like: everybody's invited to speak once before anyone speaks twice, and: try to assume that everybody is speaking with good intent.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness among you.

You might like to choose one or two of the Very Short Story questions that we like to put to guests at the end of each episode. Your answers to these can be one sentence long, or a few. Belongings are plural, as are identities and nationalities. So feel free to respond to these prompts in a way that reflects your own story.

- What's something important that you've changed your mind about?
- Are there books, poems, films, albums, works of art, etc that you've turned to again and again?
- Tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you.
- Tell us about a time when you felt foreign.
- Is there a very short story you can tell us about a time when you said something that surprised you?
- Has anyone ever said that you were disloyal to one of your cultures or identities? Why?



Season 3, Episode 4. Rev. Dr. Rachel Mann
reflection questions & episode transcript

1. How eclectic are your own tastes in music or literature? Can you think of any period of your life when a particular genre or particular artist was especially important to you?
2. Rachel says: 'I think language can be interestingly wrong...you know we are the kind of creature that is shaped by language, that is made in language' (page 10). What do you think she means by that?
3. 'People often think of the middle ages, don't they, as you know, nasty, brutish, life was short, completely lacking in any kind of subtlety and nuance, and yet, this was a time of multiple great flowerings of faith and ideas, and of searching after...' (page 13).
4. Do you think Rachel is right in her description of common understandings of the middle ages? Can you think of examples of the 'flowerings of faith and ideas' from that period?
5. When talking about Eleanor Rykener, Pádraig asks: 'In a way, Eleanor therefore becomes like the mystery of God: is it true or is it just functional? Is it fiction; does it matter? Is there a way to live in relationship with the story that might mean it can be told in a way that is flourishing rather than threatening?' (page 12). How do you reflect on that question?
6. Did anything particularly strike you in any of the poems that Rachel shared?

Rachel Mann is a poet, theologian, broadcaster, and Anglican priest, who, since 2023, has served as Archdeacon of Salford and Bolton. She has published two collections of poetry: her first, *A Kingdom of Love* (Carcenet, 2019) was highly commended in the Forward Prizes for Poetry. The areas covered by her work include theology, cultural history, and heavy metal music; she's also written a book of reflections for Lent based on the works of Jane Austen. Rachel has appeared as a panellist on the BBC Radio 4 programmes *The Moral Maze* and *Beyond Belief*, and is a regular contributor to *Thought For The Day*. Her second poetry collection, *Eleanor Among the Saints*, was published by Carcenet at the start of 2024.

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast: exploring stories and ideas about conflict, peace, theology, and art.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Hello, my name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is Rachel Mann. Rachel is a prolific writer, and broadcaster, and priest in the Church of England, and academic, and in 2023 she became an Archdeacon in the Diocese of Manchester. She has written across many genres: poetry, musical criticism, literary criticism, theology, autobiography, books of reflection for Lent and Advent, and a magnificent and delicious murder novel, too. Her second collection of poetry, Eleanor Among the Saints, was published by Carcanet at the start of this year. Rachel, you're very welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast.

Rachel Mann:

Pádraig, it's brilliant to be with you, absolutely fantastic.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

The question I'd like to start off with Rachel is: was there any particular experience or friendship in your childhood that you feel prepared you for some of the work that you do now?

Rachel Mann:

Oh, my goodness. Oh, d'you know, I'm not sure, not sure there is; I mean, I suppose that the relationship I come back to, again and again Pádraig, is my very close relationship with my younger brother, Andy. And it very much is a friendship. Um, it's one of those relationships, which was - perhaps like sibling relationships often are - was not always easy and indeed, if, if Andy was sat here now he would regale you with endless stories of my naughtiness, and my, my wickedness!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

In fact he's about to join us on the Zoom!

Rachel Mann:

Yeah indeed, he'd be delighted to join us! Um, I dare I say that the rough and tumble of our childhood relationship somehow meant that we forged something which has, has lasted. And

it's almost as if we have our own private language at times. Indeed, his wife, when we get together his wife just says: oh just leave them to it for an hour! And we just have to talk about stuff, you know, and we talk about theatre, and film, and music, and just absurd little jokes, which are our jokes. And I think that intensity of that relationship has just absolutely sort of formative for, for who I am and the kind of vocation I have. It's worth saying that, that Andy is, you know, he's not a person of faith and I wasn't a person of faith myself until I was in my mid 20s. But there is a faithfulness, there is an abiding truth in our friendship and our love for one another which somehow provides a kind of platform for, for a deep and rich desire - on my part, perhaps I fail in this - but a deep and rich desire to to explore the, the thickets as well as the, those sort of openings out that happen in human relationships.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Your work in parish and then in diocese, that must bring a lot of rough and tumble- my guess is to have a vibrant relationship with your brother that is one of, um, you know, pleasant argument and in-jokes and having to talk things out and take time to talk things out, my guess is that that was a helpful preparation for some of the demanding roles that you've had since becoming ordained.

Rachel Mann:

Absolutely, I mean, not least, because there is something about having grown up in a, in a working-class home as well... cheek by jowl in a small house where there were quite a number of us, is that, my instinct, which is to disappear very rapidly up my own fundament, and be pretentious, and pompous and, and give myself airs and graces, that's, that is brought down to size on a regular basis; you know, it doesn't, it doesn't matter how many books I might write or how many radio shows that I might have appeared- do you know what I mean, it simply is a case of: look, we know who you are, and we love you for who you are. And, and I think working in an institution like the Church of England, humbled though it has been over time (and actually, I'm very glad that this imperial pomp and circumstance, establishment organisation has been humbled over the time), nonetheless, it, it offers this invitation to see yourself as perhaps more than you actually are. And so to know what the real things are, to know what really matters, i.e. the stuff around relationships, friendships, family, the, you know, that hidden warp and weft of stuff that holds us and grounds us, that's absolutely fundamental; but of course, it also means that, you know, in the kind of role that I now have as an archdeacon which, I've often said I have to stick with the facts in this role, I have to turn towards the trouble.

It means I'm not intimidated or, or readily thrown off course when what I find is not easy or comfortable, but is tough.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

There are so many areas of conversation that we can have together: theology and literature and then your broadcasting and your public voice as an intellectual who speaks on radio and through your publishing and then, more recently, your poetry. So, I would like to start off with some of your theological thoughts, and like you speak regularly about not having grown up as a person of faith, and then in your 20s, having come to a relationship with religion. But you write, in *Spectres of God*: 'Before I came to faith, I felt haunted by God and Jesus Christ. I felt the repetitive need to pray'. I wonder if you could talk about that repetitive need to pray and where it was then that that took shape in you at that stage?

Rachel Mann:

Gosh, yeah. As a child, I did pray. I mean it's worth saying that, that I, I didn't grow up in a home in which church, God, the religious, was absent completely. But I grew up in that classic English Church of England sort of home where I went to a church of England primary school; I had a mum, still have a mum who regularly attends church, believes in God; had a dad who'd been an altar boy when he was little, and then rejected God. So, you know there was still a language of faith, there was an inheritance that I grew up with, and I grew up in a little village where, you know, there was only the Church of England. But that, that deep need to pray in me came from a place of distress really, a place of, of discomfort as a child. I can't ever remember being taught to pray very particularly outside of, you know, I sort of touch on it in one of my poems in *A Kingdom of Love*, but, you know, you were taught how to pray at school or, you know, maybe on a, you go to a, attend a church service, you know, this is how you pray; but to really pray, it came from a deep place of, of my own sense of discomfort, and very particularly as a trans kid, feeling, oh my goodness, God, help me. I mean, this is, this is basic stuff- that, that deep longing for God to try and help me cope or survive or even find a way to thrive. But I mean, this is now sounds very Pauline, doesn't it, but, you know: 'as a child I thought as a child', you know, but then, then as I grew up, as I became a teenager at least, I thought, you know, this God, if there is a God, is either some psychopath who makes sport of, of human beings and makes people like me, trans people like me, to laugh at them, or there is no God. So there was a profound rejection on my part. But, but here's the thing Pádraig that, you know, when we're talking about prayer that is not intellectual, that, that isn't, doesn't have

the smoothness of a kind of worked out formula - the kind, you know, the kind of formula that is beautiful and powerful of the Book of Common Prayer or, or the Roman Missal or whatever - that has that rawness, it will not let you go, or at least it would not let me go!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Well, someone might say that it's unusual for someone who's trans to find language for themselves in religion, and find vocation in religion, and to seek something in prayer. Um, I mean, that clearly is incorrect, but I think there would be many people who might be surprised that people who have felt alienated by language that the church might use regarding the binaries of gender, that someone like you would, would find leadership roles within the church, and seek that.

Rachel Mann

Yeah, yeah. It surprises me, I mean goodness!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

OK, I was gonna say, are you surprised, too?!

Rachel Mann:

I mean, it's like oh my goodness, just, I mean just the sheer absurdity of it, it was almost an independent proof of the existence of God, really!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

There you are! We'll write you up as one of those.

Rachel Mann:

I think, I think one of the things that, that I want to say into that is, I hear the surprise, I hear that sense of there is such a disjunction between trans identity and, and what we might call religious identity, that, you know, never the twain shall meet: I hear that. But again, I think that's based on a false binary, it's, it's based on a sense that, that to be trans or to be queer or to, to be othered, and sometimes to other ourselves or be othered by those we know, by institutions, is a kind of late mode in human history. It's, and it's a kind of post-religious mode. Where, whereas for me, that deep wrestling with that question: who am I? Who are we? What does it mean to be, and live, and dwell, and to live well and flourish? These, these are the abiding

questions, and I acknowledge that they don't necessarily require an obviously religious answer, and there are very many people in our society for very good reasons who've rejected religious answers. Yet, those questions which take us to the sediment of our being, the sediment of our lives and identities, they, they have at least an indicative answer that it's has something to do with the Divine, with God. With, with that which is in-obvious or, but is still completely before our eyes, which is, for me, one of the ways of talking about God, that God is utterly here, utterly present, and yet he/ she/ they are- they escape us. And that sense of the search, the longing, the negotiation of these challenging places within ourselves, actually, that's the vocation, that's, that's the faithful - in the richest sense - vocation to which we are, are called; because religion isn't about closing down, it isn't about saying: and now I understand, even though it's sometimes presented that way, and certainly it's presented that way, by the kind of institution that I work for, you know, or its variants, you know, whereas Roman Catholic church, et cetera et cetera, but, but that's, that's not the work to which I feel called by Jesus Christ or, or by, you know my love of, of the mystics or the love of theology. There is, it's the search.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I'm struck over and over again in both of your collections of poetry, Rachel, how there is a sensuality of the body, and a search for a name of God, or many of the names of God; and I wonder if you could read two poems from *A Kingdom of Love*: 'UBI CARITAS' on page six, and 'CREDO' on page 11, 'cause I feel like both of these are almost like mission statements for what I see much of your work being.

Rachel Mann:

Sure.

UBI CARITAS

We learn the world, the first world
Of love and drool and sweet milk
Through lips.

What surprise that prayer shares
A language with kisses?

CREDO

I am wracked by assertions:

God is *not* a name,

God is Love, God is, God *is*.

A person without a name is not,

That is one of history's truths

(I have seen the films of the camps

Where names are erased).

If God, if if if, if God

Is to be claimed as lover

I must multiply names:

Pneuma, The Three-in One,

Mother, Tetragrammaton,

Al-Wajid, Bhagavan, Diabolos,

Jesus, Jesus puts a tongue

Into my mouth, I Am.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Lips and tongue both play a prominent role in these poems. There's a way within which too, um, the second poem is pointing beyond language and saying that to speak of God is to speak of something that cannot be named singularly, and therefore you give to God many names, playfully, sensually, from across different traditions. What's the importance of the plurality of that, moving beyond singularity, or even binary?

Rachel Mann:

Oh gosh. Well, well as a theologian I have such a commitment, a commitment at the bone level, at sort of that marrow level to the impossibility of God which, which can be signalled if I was being, you know, if I was being very technical about it, in that classic binary between the *via negativa*, the negative way to God, and the positive way to God: *apophatic* versus *cataphatic*.

So, I mean you know, side bar: apophatic the, you know that way of the mystics, the stripping away of language, the getting rid of stuff so that we have the clear ground; whereas the cataphatic it's, you know, trying to, you know God is this, God is that, these, these positive categories. I feel as, as a creature, as a body, caught constantly between silence and speech; but when I speak and wanna speak of God or I mean just speak of anything pretty much, I, as I'm become aware of the inadequacy of words there is this, I mean, gosh, this desire to allow free rein, to allow the words to flow and to to fly.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and this is The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is writer and theologian Rachel Mann. Rachel, I'd like to talk to you about literature, but before I do, I want to highlight that I have seen you with an electric guitar playing very very heavy metal music. Could you speak about that as a kind of a segue into talking about forms of communication through language?

Rachel Mann:

Oh my goodness, oh, well, I, in some ways, you know Pádraig that loud guitar is my first love. You know it's sort of atavistic, primal pleasure to be found in noise. It's, it's a kind of a madness, really, if I'm- at this point to acknowledge that here I am in my mid 50s, and that is a part of myself which has - to stick with the notion of noise - the volume has been turned down on. But gosh, that sense of the, the power of sheer sound of, of volume of, of metal or punk, industrial stuff, that takes me very deep into that longing for sense, but also the longing to get beyond sort of logic and a narrative cohesion. It doesn't, you know looking back, it does not surprise me as a teenager I reached for that kind of music. And I started to play that kind of music. Because it offered me an outlet where I didn't have to deal with my own thoughts. There was something overwhelming. And I've had the great pleasure actually Pádraig of playing pretty much every style of music over the past 40-odd years; I think I started playing guitar when I was about 14/15, so, you know, it's 40 years ago, now. In that time, I've played pretty much every variety of music, but there is a, you know one of the things that is true about my love of music, and I- my, again, my younger brother takes the mickey out of me for this, you know: I'll have my iPod on shuffle, and it'll jump from Dvořák, through to death metal, to comedy songs from the 1950s, through to folk, um jazz... And he'll say, you know, well, you know: at your funeral Rachel, you know, what are we going to play basically, you know, and this and: she loved music, you know, and that's, and it's true, I just love music because it, it's

so- it has the power to subvert. It has a power to communicate beyond words, but also to lift words as well. I mean lyrics, you know, some lyrics are poetry but not all lyrics are, but it somehow, it mainlines into emotion, into the heart, into the beyond. And again, it- there's a reason that music and poetry have been part of, of religious ritual. For forever.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

They're languages of feeling as well aren't they?

Rachel Mann:

Yeah, Absolutely, yeah.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, not just concepts, it's also feeling. I mean, your, your taste in music is varied and your taste in reading presumably is too and, clearly your taste in what kind of writing you produce is as varied as your tastes in what you consume in music: magazine articles, poetry, theology, novels, public criticism, broadcasting on BBC Radio 4... I'm interested to talk to you about writing, and what is it for you therefore, ter, in the midst of being somebody who knows that language fails at a certain sense, to also being somebody who employs language to try to say something to a wider public, whether that's people who are following along Lent through your readings of Jane Austen, or considering questions about war in the British psyche. What is it that language can do? And what is it that you hope language can do?

Rachel Mann:

I think language can be interestingly wrong. That's one thing, that's, that's very true. And that's not just a pretentious or pompous thing to say, that there is within us- you know we are the kind of creature that, that is shaped by language, that is made in language. We are a communicative species, we are- but what makes us interesting is we're also fictional creatures: what I mean is that, you know, we have stories that we, we live by, you know, and and we're a mythological species and, and I'm caught constantly as a writer between that sense of - and I see in our politics at the moment - of the sheer horror that happens when words, language, meaning is used to construct narratives and stories to live by which are so patently - in my view - wicked or wrong. But I'm kind of mesmerised by that as well, because I recognise that, that, that as I, as I see that, as I might diagnose that in the absurdities of a Trump, the vileness of a Putin, that it exposes the limits of my own grasp on reality, on the extent to which I as a, as

someone who is used by language, as well as a language user, finds myself constantly at the edge of sense and meaning, and crucially, truth: I want to be truthful, I so long to be truthful and be faithful. And, and yet, I'm unsure, so I'm kind of writing to make sense, all of the time, and I think that's most particularly the case when I'm, about- what I think is the serious work of a poet that I'm, I'm testing out the possibilities of, of sense, I'm seeking after a truth that is artificial, is constructed, is crafted, but also gestures towards that which is, that which abides, that which is, and always shall be. But that's, that's, that's the compulsion Pádraig, and, and it's really telling, you know right at the moment, I'm just really, really knackered, and I've been struggling to write recently, and I, and I think that there's lots of reasons for that. But it- and when that happens, I just know I need a break really, and just to step away, to receive as well as not try and just keep giving but, but there is a compulsion within me.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I'm, one of your more recent books is, um a journey through Lent with Jane Austen. I'm from a family where plenty of us amongst the six siblings have read *Pride and Prejudice*, maybe like a dozen or 20 times. And I'm curious what it is that you see in *Pride and Prejudice* that abides- if you can limit yourself to just one or two.

Rachel Mann:

Oh my goodness. Um, there is a reality, at least for me, to the characters at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*. Lizzy and Darcy are characters for the ages, very particularly Lizzy, for me. I am in awe of her whip-smartness, her capacity as well to learn and to change; I mean, you know, at the heart- originally, *Pride and Prejudice* was called *First Impressions*. And, one level it's, it's quite a formulaic book, it's not her most- it's not Austen's most sophisticated work. Both characters change over time, they come to recognise their pride and their prejudice, but at the heart of that novel- I think part of the reason why so many of us come back is, this, the extraordinary characters of Lizzy and Darcy, but, but also this whip-smart, incisive analysis on Austen's part of human frailty, and absurdity. And yet, behind it, she's clear that there are things that matter, and that- I mean, on one level - I mean, this is, this might sound too absurd, particularly for those who know *Pride and Prejudice* well - on one level it's a horror story. You know it's a horror story, a horror story about how bloomin' awful it is, if you are an upper middle-class young woman, who's got no means to bribe men to marry you. And you know what do you do, because you can't, you know, you're not like a working-class woman who actually can go and work, you know, you are trapped, either be a governess or or you are, you

know you are real trouble. So a sort of horror story about the marriage market and about economics, and the way in which marriage is a financial exchange. But behind it is this hard core of love which goes so far beyond the romantic but is a kind of work of commitment and will to that which matters and that which abides.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast and I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama. With me today is poet, writer, priest, and theologian, Rachel Mann. I'd like as we complete the interview to talk about your most recent book of poetry, *Eleanor Among the Saints*. Could you say a little bit about who Eleanor is, and why it is that you place her among the saints?

Rachel Mann:

Yes, so yeah, Eleanor Rykener - or sometimes Eleanor John Rykener, or John Eleanor Rykener - was a 14th century seamstress, embroiderer, a sex worker, who has been reclaimed in recent medieval studies, particularly queer medieval studies, as an example of a trans person living in medieval England. And she exists in the historical record because of an interrogation undertaken against her, of her, by the mayor of London, following her arrest in Cheapside in 1394 for having sex with John Britby, a former chaplain of St Margaret Pattens. And um, during that interrogation, she spoke of how she had been, become an embroiderer how she/he had been brought into sex work through a woman called Elizabeth Brouderer. Now beyond that, Pádraig, we know, we know nothing; I mean, she talks about, how, you know, she worked in, in Oxford and London, how she embroidered clothes for, for the priests with whom she had sex. But here's the thing, some people say: well, look, here you go, here's an example of a trans person who, who lived in the middle ages or a male-bodied trans person. There are others who say: ah well actually this is a cautionary tale. This is a fiction that was added into the court records as a way of, of threatening anyone who stepped out of the gender norm, or who was, was gay, or lesbian, or presented differently than the, the rules and regulations of human conduct at that time expected.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

In a way, Eleanor therefore becomes like the mystery of God: is it true or is it just functional? Is it fiction; um, does it matter? Is there a way to live in relationship with the story that might mean that story can be told in a way that is flourishing rather than threatening?

Rachel Mann:

Absolutely, and I think this is where my desire to test out what it would mean for her to be found among the saints emerged. It's worth saying that, I guess as a matter of happenstance as much as anything, she was a contemporary or near contemporary of Mother Julian of Norwich, and of Margery Kempe. And, and those two figures, they are names to conjure with, they really are. I mean Mother Julian of Norwich talks about Jesus our mother; um, Margery Kempe, who was put on trial for heresy on at least one occasion if not two occasions, who was this troublous woman who, who dared to don white in middle age, after having given birth to 11 children, and said that Jesus had made her a virgin. Again I mean, these are queer figures, these are, these are figures to to contend with and, to bring Eleanor into conversation with them as a near contemporary, it just struck me as- it's not, it's not just simply about creating an archive or recovering lost voices (I mean it's worth noting, both Margery and Julian were lost voices for very many centuries, their texts were lost and then discovered later). But to have that sense of, if, if one doesn't fit the authorised narrative of what it is to be a human being, or, or one steps aside from the regular patterns of life. What, what does God mean then, what is that, what does it mean to, to be someone seeking after holiness, then? Er, I also bring her into conversation with the likes of Catherine of Siena um, not quite a near contemporary of Eleanor, but again another medieval saint whose behaviour went so far beyond any kind of, of norm or legitimacy who said that she could only exist on the host, on the body of Jesus. And - I mean content warning here - reputedly used twigs to make herself ill if she was required to eat, quote, 'normal food'. There is something extraordinary about the middle ages as this this time of, of vibrancy, of extraordinary lay theology, of great sophistication in theology, Pádraig; I mean people often think of the middle ages, don't they, as you know, nasty, brutish, life was short, completely lacking in any kind of subtlety and nuance, and yet, this was a time of multiple great flowerings of faith and ideas, and of searching after...

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And writing.

Rachel Mann:

Yeah, indeed, and you know, well, yes, Mother Julian and Margery Kempe, their words being the first of their kind from women in English. You know they're just extraordinary.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. I'm struck by the way that you bring Eleanor into conversation with these historical figures. Also, you, together with other queer scholars, highlighting Eleanor as Eleanor is preserved in the record. I'm struck by two things, one: that part of the record names interrogation, which is a very contemporary word regarding trans identity, and the interrogation that people can feel, and the interrogation that people are subjected to on a regular basis. And two: that you, in as much as you sought vocation within the church yourself, you also bring Eleanor into conversation with these major figures, that there is erm, that there is some kind of joining together in creative tension, that seems to be of interest to you in your work, and perhaps it has been a vocation that's been forced onto you by the circumstances of the world that demand of you such language to speak.

Rachel Mann:

Gosh, yes. I mean, my instinctive reaction is to say Pádraig, I wish I wish there was other stuff that I could write about. I mean, there are, I mean, this, there's so much - as you will know better than I - there is so much terrific, extraordinary, contemporary poetry out there, testing out and searching identity in countless ways, erm. I find myself in a situation, to my ongoing shock and surprise, where I am a priest and indeed now a senior leader in a small 'c' conservative institution. And yet I don't fit, and, and yet, I kind of love my body, and I love my oddness, and I don't want to have to smush myself into convention. And it's unsurprising therefore that I will need to find a way to speak as someone who is a searcher, as someone who feels compelled to write and, and find words for that which I cannot say, and perhaps never can say. And it doesn't surprise me therefore that- I mean in both poetry collections, I work with characters; I think a lot of folks might think that the priest in the opening section of *A Kingdom of Love*, they might think it's me, but it's not me, it's me and it's not me, it's me testing out what it means to be a priest and therefore I'm there and I'm not there; and, yet likewise in *Eleanor*, Eleanor Rykener has aspects of me, but she's not me and cannot be me.

Pádraig Ó Tuama

Yeah. I keep on returning to the poem 'Substitutions' that you have in *Eleanor Among the Saints* on page 12. It feels like to me that one of the things that you're attempting in all of this is to find stitches that bring today and medieval times together, that bring characters together, not by saying they're each the same, but by, by looking at the ways within which lives reflect off each other. I wonder if you could read that poem as we finish.

Rachel Mann:

SUBSTITUTIONS

For seam read rip	For rip read stitch
For stitch read thread	For thread read tear
For tear read notion	For notion read button
For button read hole	For hole read dressed
For dressed read bare	For bare read scared
For scared read cut	For cut read tears
For tears read rags	For rags read scraps
For scraps read all	For all read all

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Rachel Mann, it has been a great pleasure to talk to you on The Corrymeela Podcast. Thank you for your time.

Rachel Mann:

Thank you Pádraig for having me on.

The Corrymeela Podcast is created in partnership between Corrymeela and FanFán. It's produced by Emily Rawling, with mixing, editing, and theme music by Fra Sands at Safeplace Studios, and presented by me, Pádraig Ó Tuama. The podcast is generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Community Relations Council Northern Ireland, and the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund. Thanks to them, and thanks to Corrymeela's friends and supporters, and thanks to you for listening.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So our Very Short Story questions, Rachel. Here's the first: what's something important that you've changed your mind about?

Rachel Mann:

Time. What I mean is having it. I used to live as if I had no tomorrow and my health was so bad at one point. That's just how I lived, and realising that hey - and it's happened - I might outlive one or both my parents is a huge change, and learning therefore to treat time as gift rather than requiring frenetic activity.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I recognise that this next question might be asking you to, to name a million items rather than just one, but I'm curious if there's a book or a poem or a film or an album or a work of art, just one, that you've turned to again and again throughout your life.

Rachel Mann:

This is cheeky, but *A Dance to the Music of Time* by Anthony Powell. Because it's 12 books, but it's one book. And I go back again and again and again, it's so totally different to any kind of life I would lead. It's the story of upper middle-class people from the 20s through to the 70s. And yet, I love how funny it is. I go back because it's full of wisdom, in fact, there, I mean, there's a quote that I'm going to just share with you that I just love, that, so one of the characters says at one point: 'Growing old is like being increasingly penalised for a crime you haven't committed'. I just love lines like that. Love it.