

TFEO The Transposition of Chloe Bronte

Transcript

Sun, Jun 11, 2023 9:51AM • 30:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

chloe, audio drama, laughter, bronte, episode, story, visitation, max, alien, unreliable narrator, work, happening, clip, life, talk, point, world, sleep, sleep paralysis, short films

SPEAKERS

Narrator, Max, William J. Meyer, Chloe, W. Keith Tims

W. Keith Tims 00:11

Hello, and welcome to The First Episode Of, a podcast about audio drama and the creative process. I'm W Keith Tims, writer and podcaster, creator of The Book of Constellations. In this show, I listen to the first episode of an audio drama and have a discussion with the creators about the show their methods, their struggles, and successes. Today we're discussing the first episode of The Transposition of Chloe Bronte.

W. Keith Tims 00:38

[Theme music from The Transposition of Chloe Bronte.] Written and produced by William J. Meyer. The Transposition of Chloe Bronte is a low fi sci fi sorta rom com. It follows the life of Chloe and Max two college students who live together in a one bedroom attic apartment. Their lives are filled with their routines of class and work until one night in bed, Chloe becomes paralyzed, and witnesses a strange creature coming out of the wall. Max doesn't believe her, but Chloe begins to suspect that there is a conduit to an alien world in their bedroom, and she has something to do with it. Meyer is a writer of novels, plays, short films, and has had his work performed in the anthology audio drama Strange/Love. The transposition of Chloe Bronte recently released its eighth and final episode. The first episode, the weird thing introduces us to Chloe and Max, and shows us the first of Chloe's strange visitations. I spoke to William remotely from his home in Los Angeles.

W. Keith Tims 01:49

Tell us a little bit about your background as an artist and how you came to create the Transposition of Chloe Bronte,

William J. Meyer 01:56

You know, I'm trying, I'm trying not to be a goofball. But like, when I was five years old, my my mom was a single mother through through a low income program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, got me into an after

school art program. I just remember making like wind chimes and watercolor paintings and just sort of like beginning to, you know, express imaginative possibilities like, and you know, at that age, the watercolor paintings are mostly At-At Walkers from the Empire Strikes Back.

W. Keith Tims 02:30

Awesome.

William J. Meyer 02:31

And, yeah, and then also in grade school, you know, we would have classes where they're like, pick a character, you know, and write a story about them. Or, you know, remember we had a trading program where our grade would write short stories that the older kids would then give us feedback on in the other grades. Well, then I went to college for Radio TV film, and began to realize that everything I was doing required writing in order to get the project manifested. So I'm like, well, maybe I should be thinking more about the writing as the foundation because really, it was like, Well, I want to make a movie. Well, you need a script to make a movie. So write the script. I did in college have a audio drama, a weekly half hour radio show, it was the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. The way they ran their program. You could pitch shows for both TV and radio. And if they got accepted, you got a little time slot.

W. Keith Tims 03:19

This was on the college radio station.

William J. Meyer 03:21

Yeah, I can't remember the distance that went. This was an Oshkosh Wisconsin. I feel like it went to Fond du Lac in the south and Appleton in the north. And I don't know, but sometime post college, I wrote my first novel, and then just kept writing and yeah.

W. Keith Tims 03:35

Did you did you study writing or create anything creative in college?

William J. Meyer 03:39

Well, my master of arts was radio, TV films. So looking back on it now, I think I'm not saying this from a point of regrets, but I probably should have done more theater stuff. I did do theater stuff. But once I moved to Los Angeles, was when I like really started going to theater. And I've seen like a lot of cool shows and only started writing plays like five years ago. In fact, Chloe started as a play in the sense that sometimes when I first start something, I'm not sure what it is yet. And I just do draft after draft and then kind of like, mold it and try to figure out

W. Keith Tims 04:11

What is the genesis of this story? What does it mean to you as the creator?

William J. Meyer 04:15

I was listening to someone describe their experience with sleep paralysis. And as they were describing it, I said to myself, Oh, that's what that's what's been happening to me for like 20 years. (laughter)

W. Keith Tims 04:29

So you've been suffering from this.

William J. Meyer 04:31

I had no inclination. And I'm willing to admit this, because, you know, I've come to a place of acceptance. If you don't know, at least in my experience of sleep paralysis, you can't move. For me it was like waking up at like two or three in the morning. I can't move and sort of witnessing or seeing a creature and traditionally, you know, sometimes people describe this thing sitting on them. And you know, they might call their sleep demon, but for me, it was like a dog-sized insectoid alien. (laughter) And this thing and I know describing it, it's you're like, Okay, were you, what's going on here? But the veracity of the image is just as pure as your waking life. And it's like your thing. And you think, well, how can that continually happen to you and you not look into it? I don't have an answer Keith. All I know is at a certain point, it was no longer threatening, like, at first I was scared. And then I realized nothing was happening. And I was like, they might just half awake/half in a dream. Like, it was just bizarre. And then once I heard this person describe it, I looked it up, because now I had a term to associate with the phenomenon. And I was like, Oh, this is it. And there's a long cultural history of artwork. Like we talk about in the show, "The Nightmare" by Henry Fuseli is like one example that sort of like a primordial expression of sleep paralysis. So I was like, Okay, I'm gonna, I'm gonna write about this now, and kind of have this expunging work of arts; not not that I was like, in, you know, a traumatic, although it does sound. It does sound rather traumatic. (laughter)

W. Keith Tims 06:09

Well, I mean, yes, if I were to wake up and had to have a dog sized bug sitting on my chest, that that would be a little scary. But as you said, you came to terms with it. But that made its way into the show. So is this a is this a personal story?

William J. Meyer 06:22

Yes. In the first, like, third, and then my imagination takes over. And I'm like, given the realms of fantasy and sci fi, I could make all those fears be true. Thinking something is entering our space from another space. Okay, what if that was true?

W. Keith Tims 06:37

Do you still have sleep paralysis like this now?

William J. Meyer 06:41

It's funny, because when I started working on it, I was like, hey did this like, do the trick. Is it gone? And then it was just like, a month or so ago, I was like, really stressed out and, and it happened again. And I was like, eh whatever. (laughter)

W. Keith Tims 06:57

One of the things I really like about your show, is that you put a lot of little detail, very specific kind of detail into the lives of Chloe and Max. A lot of the story is not, at least in the first episode is not directly about, right. The visitation I mean, there's a whole section of it, but it's mostly about them and the life that they're living together. You especially described in detail, this is nightmarish, tiny little attic room that they're living in. It's very, very cramped, and the water from the shower gets onto the bed. And you know, it's just, this seems very oddly specific to me. Is this a real place that you maybe you lived in?

William J. Meyer 07:34

(laughter) Yeah, ish. There were two places I've lived that I basically combined into one that was a converted attic. And then the place I live now, which from a production standpoint, I used when I had to do the Foley and stuff to recreate certain things. I'm like, well, they're basically sleeping where I'm sleeping. (laughter) And they eat where I eat. So it became sort of, for me anyway, sort of like a fun in-joke.

W. Keith Tims 08:07

I totally believe that students at a university would live in a little tiny place like that. So I was on board with that when I heard it. How did you learn sound design?

William J. Meyer 08:18

I did have radio classes in college where I think, I mean, it started a little bit before that just messing around with stuff at home. But into college. You know, we did rudimentary stuff and various projects, I would say mostly because of the short films I did, I would end up doing the majority of the soundtrack work as well, other than the music.

W. Keith Tims 08:37

Yeah, you've done audio drama before. And I guess I'm curious as to why you wanted to do this story now. Sleep paralysis, you said you've been living this with this for years. What made you want to produce Chloe when you did?

William J. Meyer 08:51

I've been off more than I can chew. When I was doing I was doing a an audio fiction anthology show. And it was it was like reading short stories, and then doing sound design for the short stories. And then occasionally bringing voices in. Then I started writing Chloe. And I'm like, well, this is a full cast thing. As it developed, I realized it needed to be its own thing. But at the same time, I was casting and recording remotely other actors for these two other storylines. And somehow, because I was working remotely with all these actors, I thought, well, some voices will come in for this project and that project, and I'll just, you know, they'll grow concurrently it's, and what I realized, this is not the way to do this is this is juggling too much. So I had four storylines running, and I prioritize the two that had most of the vocal performances already recorded. And once I finished that one, and then I'm like, well, it's time to do Chloe, because at that point, I was only missing two actors. And that was the other thing. I mean, I freely admit, this was like a learning experience because I've done short films that I've done a little bit of theater and everyone is present in you know, in the same space and you're working linearly, in a sense, but on this, it's like, well, I've got someone in Boston, I've got someone in Orlando, New Mexico music

in London. Everyone is doing it while they can and when they can, and it's sort of coming in piecemeal. It just came together, now-ish over the last year. And then also, I think, serendipitously, some of the themes of the show are about mourning, the expression of grief, which collectively as people we're going through, so I felt well, you know, let the river flow where it wants to and finish Chloe now.

W. Keith Tims 10:38

Let's talk a bit about the show, Chloe and Max our students, we learn that she's a professional mourner. We don't learn that for certain until episode two. But there are hints dropped in the first episode, which, out of context are very puzzling but interesting. During the course of the first night that we meet them, she has a strange visitation throws her boot at the thing and the boot vanishes through the wall. Max is a philosophy students and as such, he is prone to pontificate about everything and everything. He also is a bicycle rider, he wants to do triathlon. But there's some question about whether he actually has the gumption to do it. And he still hasn't said I love you to Chloe. So we're not sure if he's a great guy or not yet. They live in this tiny, little, tiny little room. And really, the first episode is mostly just them. It's just about their lives and you get a good sense of their personality, you get a good sense that Max likes to hear himself talk. You get a good sense that Chloe, she frequently talks about how she feels out of control in her life, that she's disassociated. She even concludes the first episode talking about I don't belong here.

Chloe 11:53

[Begin clip from The Transposition of Chloe Bronte] Look at all these cars, the people in them driving on by no clue about us and us? No clue about them.

Max 12:05

Zero clues.

Chloe 12:07

We're all unconnected.

Max 12:09

Sonder? ("soon-der")

Chloe 12:11

Yeah. Sonder. ("sawn-der")

Max 12:13

(correcting her) Sonder. ("soon-der")

Chloe 12:16

Or maybe I'm just walking in place. And the rest of you are moving by, like on a sheet. Someone turning the crank?

Max 12:25

Yeah, probably. [End clip.]

W. Keith Tims 12:27

We do have the one moment of visitation. And I do want to come back to that. But I am curious as to why you wanted to focus so much on them right from the start.

William J. Meyer 12:37

I think a lot of it is the sort of science fiction and fantasy stories I'm attracted to. So just to pick an example, like one of my favorite television shows is the Outer Limits the original. And a lot of these episodes are about domestic situations. Plus, quote unquote, the weird thing. And this is literally why I call it The Weird Thing in the Transposition of Chloe Bronte because in breaking down the storytelling that I wanted to do, I just made it literal, something weird happens to an otherwise grounded normal couple. I just wanted to focus on what in their relationship could metaphorically manifest the strangeness. So to me that has an equal weight, you know, like an airplane has two wings. One wing is the weird thing. And the other wing is the not weird.

W. Keith Tims 13:28

I get a sense that Chloe may be an unreliable narrator. It's hard for us, at least in the first episode, to be entirely certain that what she experiences is what's really happening. Certainly Max doesn't take her seriously. And the evidence that she offers is kind of flimsy at best. Chloe frequently talks about feeling that she is disassociated that she doesn't know her place. And as such that lends me to think that she is this unreliable narrator that we can't entirely be certain that what we're hearing is real.

Chloe 14:02

[Begin clip.] When I was in grade school, I told the other kids I was an alien from another world. Not once, not twice. I told them all the time, lunch, recess, gym class, on the potty. I told them so hard that I almost believed it myself. I'm still thinking about it. What 20 years later? Because if it were true, if I was actually an alien, it would explain so much. So much. Or at least give my life some context. You know? Wouldn't that be great? [End clip.]

W. Keith Tims 14:59

Is that something that you wanted to inject into the story?

William J. Meyer 15:02

From the point of view of Max being like a gateway character for the audience. Yeah, the sense that it's more interesting to have the tension of is this really happening? Or is it not up to a certain point, and then you have to make your call, I guess. I do try to play it both ways for as long as possible. And at a certain point, Max makes his decision, and the audience may agree with him or not.

W. Keith Tims 15:26

One of the things I think you do to heighten this tension and I really liked what you did here is that you do rely on a narrator for some of the show you have a voice come in and explain what's happening and frame things in certain contexts and that sort of thing. The narrator is conspicuously absent during the

visitation, you have a very long sequence of really gruesome and nightmarish sounds of the visitation of the thing and the audience hears everything without any context whatsoever.

Narrator 15:56

[Begin clip.] Chloe frequently went to sleep listening to a song, she let it seep deep into her mind. What song? Her favorite song. [She plays a melancholy guitar and female vocal-based song on a tinny cassette recorder.]

Max 16:12

(trying to sleep) Groan.

Chloe 16:14

You want me to turn it off?

Max 16:16

No, no, no.

16:19

[Music begins to distort. Strange insectoid noises begin. Chloe grunts in pain. Music distortion. Indistinct supernatural noises.] [End clip.]

W. Keith Tims 17:19

Talk to me about your choice for that particular scene.

William J. Meyer 17:22

The narrator never acknowledges the weird. He does talk about something happening to her in the sense of she's between asleep and awake. And she has you know, her unconscious and her subconscious are, are doing things but never... Like he's very literal about some things, right? Oh, there's a plant on the windowsill. But he never says there was a creature in the air like, like he's removed from the supra-natural as a way for me to underscore the subjective nature of it to Chloe, like it's her experience. It's not our experience it's Chloe's experience. So everything about it comes to us through her and not the narrator and not Max, not any other character that appears later.

W. Keith Tims 18:07

So then again, that that kind of reinforces this question of can I trust what Chloe is saying, which is really nice tension. I mean, I'm a sucker for unreliable narrators. So I think that's a great hook. The other thing that I really like about the show is sort of this existential discussion. There's a whole sequence where Chloe looks out of the window and the narrator talks about what she's thinking. She feels like she's in a world that is a terrarium. On the other side of the glass is another world that's on a one to one scale with theirs. She feels separate and distant, and that she's not connected to this world. And Max as the philosophy student, he's not grounding, either. He's always asking questions. Are you a fan of existential dilemmas and people struggling with that?

William J. Meyer 18:54

I just write from the inside out. So.

W. Keith Tims 18:58

Do you feel disassociated or that you don't belong?

William J. Meyer 19:01

I mean, for sure as like an art kid, quote, unquote, right? Having that... Oh, you'd like comic books? I'm gonna punch you like what? (laughter) And then just sort of the repetition of what you enjoy is dumb. So you're dumb. I mean, straight up, Chloe, you will hear in many episodes, fights for the fact that, you know, hey, I'm not dumb. Also, just from what's fun to think about standpoint, like that existential. I don't want to say despair, but you know, something adjacent to despair, that certainly there's been an enormous disconnect with the pandemic, and there's no way around the fact that like, straight up right now, Keith, you're just like a voice coming in my earbuds. How do I know you're not a bot? (laughter) Like, I trust that you're not because I've seen you online and we've connected in other arenas. But when the mind starts reeling, it just spirals.

W. Keith Tims 20:00

Everyone on the internet is a robot except for you.

William J. Meyer 20:02

Right? You know, just the fact of my family living 3000 miles away and I'm out here, the pandemic is a situation of physical separation. And then also we can't deny the spiritual separation of the divisiveness going on these days. So like I said, I write from the inside out. But then at a certain point, the characters have to take a life of their own right? I don't believe in you know, everyone in this story being me and no way do they represent me. And they say things I don't believe and do things I wouldn't do.

W. Keith Tims 20:34

I love the fact that Chloe starts off the whole show just talking about it would be it would be so much easier if it turned out that I was an alien. (laughter) Because then she would have context for her life.

William J. Meyer 20:46

Yep. Yeah, I definitely a long time ago, when I was in high school had that, Oh, if only this one thing changed, then my entire life would come together and congeal into an understandable. Oh, it's I mean, that's, that's what the fairy tale is right? Oh, you're actually the secret Princess of this lost kingdom. And you have this bold destiny ahead of you? And it's like, oh, no, I know who I am. Great. Let's do it.

W. Keith Tims 21:10

What did you want to accomplish in this first episode? And how do you think it did?

William J. Meyer 21:13

I think what I wanted to accomplish was, hey, there's something interesting here happening, I'm gonna listen to episode two. So in that regard, I was like, well, here's who they are. And then here's the

addition of the weird thing. And this is going to be the genre element that we carry through. This goes back to and I always think of this because I don't I know he didn't mean it this way. But George Lucas on the commentary for THX 1138, one of my favorite science fiction films, he says the studio kept wanting him to quote unquote, put the freaks up front, because they said that people need to know right away, this movie is weird. And he's like, No, I don't want to put the freaks up front. I actually come from it. Now. I know, it sounds awful for someone to side to side with a studio note. But I'm like, actually, I think there's something to this, like, if you know, sooner than later, that's something that this is a weird thing, that something strange and odd is going to happen throughout, then you can kind of like settle into that rhythm of okay. And then also, it sets up a tension, right? Because you're like, when's it going to happen? Again? Is it going to happen again? And if it does, we'll Max see it or just Chloe or with someone else be there? Or is it always going to be in the bedroom, or the sleeping milk rather, or you know, can happen anywhere? And you you have pieces to deal with that you can start to put together on your own. As far as it being successful in that regard or not? I mean, well, maybe? (laughter) We don't really know what the threshold is between someone being moved by something, you make a put on the internet, and the threshold between that and them actually telling you, like, you could be you could be rocking someone's world, man. Like they could be in tears when you want, you know, when you intend through the story, and they can be laughing, they can be cheering and everything. And then when the story is done, you know, they close the app or whatever, and they go to work or cut the grass or whatever they do. And you know, it may not connect to a review or a tweet, or, or whatever. And that doesn't mean you're a failure. It just means you don't know.

W. Keith Tims 23:19

Right? I've gotten some nice reviews. And you know, I've gotten I'm very happy about that. And some people on Twitter have said some nice things about my show. I got one unsolicited email from a stranger who told me that he found this particular episode really moving. And man, I lived off that for a week. That just like that, just that's the good stuff right there.

William J. Meyer 23:40

Right, I did see on pod chaser, a review I really enjoyed for one of the episodes of Chloe, which was quote, I feel you girl unquote, (laughter) I was like, success!

W. Keith Tims 23:56

We're talking a bit about struggles. What do you struggle with creatively?

William J. Meyer 24:00

Okay, so David Milch, do you know that writer, he created Deadwood, among other shows? And he says whatever your mind tells you about writing, when you're not writing, don't believe it. (laughter) You know what? That's right. Because when I'm not writing, that's when all the doubt because I think doubt is good, like from the Zen perspective, which is like, great faith and great doubt work together. But in terms of you should not be writing based on these metrics. There's no swimming pool in the backyard. You're not driving a Lamborghini, you know, you don't have the book deal or whatever. It's like, Well, okay, all all of those worldly metrics have to be set aside. So the struggle is on the page, am I my doing what I can for this story and for these characters, and sometimes that can really be depressing,

because it's like, I don't know. And then it's like, at a certain point, just saying, well, it's done. Whatever it is, it's done. I now, hopefully I learned something from that. And I'm taking it to the next thing because I have to let it go. And like Neil Gaiman constantly saying just finish the thing. Because otherwise it's, I mean, it's the unfinished novel will always be perfect, right? Because you didn't finish it. So it lives only only in your brain space. Every 10 minutes, I have a different opinion about the thing I'm working on. Like it just, I don't know, man, I have problems. (laughter)

W. Keith Tims 25:29

Well, let me ask them, How do you measure success?

William J. Meyer 25:33

I just want to make my mom proud at this point. I think the older I get, the less I care about the other stuff. And I'm just like, well, I'm getting up there. She's getting up there. And, you know, a lot of a lot of writers are only found after they're dead. So let's say that happens. (laughter) In that case, I just want to make something that you know, the people I love can be like, Yeah, that's cool.

W. Keith Tims 25:56

I was looking over your, your resume, you've got a lot of productions in in your history, and you've talked about how you have a lot of projects, what keeps you motivated, what keeps you coming back to do all this stuff.

William J. Meyer 26:06

I think it's just a general curiosity. Like even even for Chloe Bronte, like there's, you know, a fair amount of stuff in there that required research on my part stuff I didn't know, like, I have ideas. But those ideas, once they're investigated, lead to learning something that for me, has always been a big thing. You know, as a writer, you have homework every weekend, just a general sense of curiosity about history, the world, science, theology, philosophy, human beings, art, whatever, and just sort of channeling it into a form of, you know, a story.

W. Keith Tims 26:40

The one of the things that always baffles me when I meet people in the world is that there are some people that just don't seem to be curious about anything.

William J. Meyer 26:48

That is very, very weird. And I agree with you. I've had people say to me, I don't watch documentaries. And you're like, Well, okay, why? And it's like, well, that's like learning. And it's like, what? (laughter)

W. Keith Tims 27:04

And I can get that some people don't like, for example, a dry documentary but even then there's, you know, there's other things or alternate ways to expand your horizons and learn new stuff. And I don't get it, just not being curious. What's something that you wish you had known about making audio drama before you got into it?

William J. Meyer 27:25

You may not know there are people out there who want to work with you as much as you want to work with them, that you shouldn't be ashamed of whatever material is inside you. And although you may not feel a part of the world, you are in some degree. I mean, we come out of the world. We are in the world, and so is everyone else. I knew a guy who would say, well, the universe is uncaring. And I'm like, Well, I'm not I'm caring. And guess what, I'm a part of the universe. I think approaching audio drama, especially when you work remotely with actors, it can feel so isolating. But let's let's face it with today's technology can reach out and connect with another human being and create art together. And that's a beautiful thing right?

Narrator 28:06

[Begin clip.] The ring binder was old and damaged, and due to break if dropped. When Chloe was alone, she would examine the first page of that concealed notebook again and again. She would trace her fingers over what was written there. And she would knit her brow as if trying to decipher an alien language

Chloe 28:35

I don't belong here. I don't belong here. I don't belong here.

Narrator 28:44

The truth of that statement was yet to be determined. (Chloe's favorite song plays, warped and distorted.) [End clip.]

W. Keith Tims 29:12

Sometimes funny, sometimes intense. The Transposition of Chloe Bronte is a story about trying to find a connection to a world that is often confusing and alien. Chloe and Max's relationship is at the heart of the story. But Chloe herself is a kind of hero for those who feel like they don't belong. And they just want some sort of context to help explain their lives. You can listen to the Transposition of Chloe Bronte on most major podcast platforms, or see our show notes for more information. [Begin end theme music.] The first episode of is written and produced by W. Keith Tims. All opinions expressed in this show belong to the people who expressed them and not necessarily to anyone else. The theme song is Mockingbird by David Mumford the show's web page is thefirstepisodeof.com. If you're an audio drama creator and would like to be on the show, send an email to thefirstepisodeof@gmail.com. If you'd like down to earth sci fi audio drama, check out my show The Book of Constellations wherever you get your podcasts. Keep telling stories. The only way we're going to get out of this mess. Until next time!

W. Keith Tims 30:10

(c) 2022 W. Keith Tims / Alien Ghost Robot Creative Media / thefirstepisodeof.com