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[Episode 109: Byron Vincent](#) – (10/01/2018)

Transcript edited by David Turner

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Byron Vincent – **BV**

Introduction:

DT: Hello welcome to episode 109 of Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. Happy New Year, at least we all hope it's a happy one, eh? Today's episode was recorded on the 18th of December last year, but these things take time to edit and release. Also, with the podcast, it doesn't seem like there's anything worth putting out over Christmas because everyone's busy

or so it seems. Today's episode is with the wonderfully talented Byron Vincent, we met up at the Workhouse Kitchen in Bristol to record the chat.

If you're in Bristol and you're looking for something good to eat and a coffee or something, or juices and all the other stuff that cafes do, you should pop along there, it's really good.

I met up with Byron just before he went to perform a gig and we chatted about class, mental health, trauma... I think we might have chatted about some lighter stuff as well but I can't quite remember. We laughed a lot, so it must have been funny and I'm sure it wasn't just the laughter of two 'service users'.

Byron has recently had quite a long break from doing spoken word stuff as he's been away working in theatres and on the radio, with documentaries and such. It was good to chat about what he'd been doing and why was coming back and it was really good to see him at the gig afterwards.

Unfortunately, we didn't have that much time to chat because there were some travel issues with Byron getting into Bristol so we ran out of time a little bit. To save some time we didn't record any poetry readings but Byron kindly recorded a couple of poems and emailed them to me, so they'll come up at the end of the interview. So, when the chat's finished stick around for two poems. Links to Byron and Milk and as much as possible that's mentioned in the chat will be in the episode description.

As usual if you want to find out more about what's going on with the podcast go to 'Lunar Poetry Podcast' on Facebook or Instagram, @Silent_Tongue on Twitter, or www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com where you can also download a transcript of this episode and just about all the episodes in our archive.

One bit of news for 2018 is that myself and my wife Lizzy have started an accompanying podcast to run alongside this series called 'a poem the week' in which we'll bring you a poem a week. So far, episode one features Byron Vincent reading his poem 'Wot' which will come up at the end of this program. Episode two is me reading a fantastic poem by Susanna Galbraith called 'to' which features in the latest issue of The Tangerine Magazine. You can find all those episodes over at SoundCloud by searching 'a poem a week' or following the links in the episode description or following a poem a week, all one word, on both Facebook and Twitter.

I'm quite excited by this little side project because it will return me and Lizzy back to why we first got interested in poetry and that was the individual poems themselves and really the whole basis of running this podcast was to just provide a platform for poems and for people to share their work. Whether it's the author themselves reading their work or that week's host.

As usual, if you like what we do, whether it's this Lunar Poetry Podcasts series or the new a poem a week, do us a favour and tell your friends. It really helps. It works better than any other form of advertising and we'll love you forever. That's enough from me... well here's some more of me but least Byron's taking up most of the space. Cheers.

Conversation:

DT: Hello Byron. How are you doing?

BV: I'm really well thanks.

DT: Thanks for joining us.

BV: Glad to be here.

DT: I was going to comment on the weather outside but it's really misty through the windows so I can only presume it's still cold.

BV: Yeah, you can feel it, even though you can't see it.

DT: We're meeting up in Bristol, because as regular listeners will know this is now where the podcast is based, but maybe we should just talk a bit about your connections to the city and why you're here doing the gig?

BV: So, I've got a lot of connections to the city, I came here in about 2005, I think, and in fact the very first week I was here I went to a poetry night at Bristol Old Vic. There's an old guard of Bristol poets who I love to bits, Julian Ramsey-Wade, Lucy English, Rosemary Donne. I went to a slam and I'd never been to one before, I didn't know what it was that I was attending. I just saw them and thought, "maybe I'll have a crack at that" and very quickly became immersed in the poetry scene here.

I'm not a mad fan of slam poetry, by the way, but it was really good for me at the time, just to give me a little bit confidence, get me out on stage. I went through my little 'derivative phase', as everybody does, of looking at other people and soaking it up like The Borg. It was useful and handy and has led to a career.

DT: It's a really welcoming space if you want to just get onto a microphone isn't, it?

BV: Some might argue too welcoming! But, yeah, it is very welcoming and Bristol is a very friendly town and [it had] those gigs in very rough pubs where you would have to shout over bar fights and whatnot. I think it's become more civilised since then.

DT: It's a shame, isn't it?

BV: Yeah, it is a bit.

DT: South London used to be like that. I remember a gig we did and the pub was still rough enough to get some really angry comments from the bar. Even that place has changed now,

that's completely gone. I quite like it when people tell you that they don't want you reading. If that's not what they want, they should be able to tell you to tell you.

BV: Well, I'm very strongly of the opinion that you shouldn't force poetry on people that don't want to hear it. It's cruel and it's not fair. Throughout the many years I've been doing this, I've seen that happen a lot. Just as an aside, once for a popular poetry organisation that shall remain nameless, that used to have a lot of wacky ideas about where to send its rota of artists. They would always put you into positions that were soul destroying.

There was a place in London called, Shunt, I don't know if you remember it was under London Bridge. It was this vast array of catacombs, it was a nightclub. They put me in a 'Britney Spears Mic', they had Helen Mort standing on a podium, I can't remember who else was there... Molly Naylor was there, sat on a shelf. They made me stand on the bar like Tom Cruise in Cocktail, literally preventing like a ten-deep bar from getting their drinks with the power of poetry.

Can you imagine this sea of really drunk people really angry, that they're not getting a drink, and me in a 'Britney Spears Mic' sort of trying to do iambic pentameter or whatever? It was just a nightmare. A lot of that used to go on.

DT: Actually, that was the particular problem in that pub when we did that night, was that the woman that ran the boozier and she told people to please be quiet while people were reading poems and that she would serve them in between poems. People just lost their shit, because... of course they would, it's their local.

BV: You can't prevent people from their booze in a local boozier without causing some kind of resentment.

DT: For how long did you do the slam gigs for and how long did it take you to find more of a natural home?

BV: I did slam for a couple of years because... To explain all of that... My personal background is, I didn't go to school much. I was kicked out of school at 15, I wasn't very literate when I left school because I'm dyslexic. So, moving into a world where... I performed before but not to the same extent. Moving into that poetry world... I didn't really know it. I'd read bits and always soaked stuff up and I was a fan of reading but I wasn't writing anything like [the poetry] I enjoyed. I was writing for performance and I still do, my favourite poets and my favourite poems have got no or little relationship with my writing.

So, I did that for a couple of years and I didn't really know what I was doing, I was probably performing for the wrong reasons. I was enjoying the gratification you get from a kind audience and the attention I got. I never called myself a poet but other people were and that was gratifying to me because of my lack of, well because of my personal history. Because I, very much so, was told that I was thick and wouldn't amount to much. So, on a very superficial level it was gratifying.

DT: Bits of that resonate with me and I think and [while] I do agree and get what you're saying and it's easier when you're not the one saying about yourself. But I would counter that with saying that it's not all superficial, is it? There's a very important role that those gigs play in making you realise that literature could be part of your life. If you've been told previously that it shouldn't be or, in your words, "you're too thick" to engage with it.

BV: Yeah. I'd always written poetry, even when it was a dyslexic scrawl that looked like smashed spiders on a page. I'd always written poetry and then in the early 1990s I did get up and do some stuff at [music] gigs but it was very angry. I was straight off the estate back then and I was carrying a lot, so it was really of that political ranting lilt with a smidge of surrealism because I can't help that, I can't curb it. [Then I started] experimenting with who I wanted to be and what my voice was.

But that world of slam poetry is [just] three minutes of entertainment and it creates a certain voice, you know, it pushes a certain voice. I never had 'slam voice', thankfully but I did fall into a couple of cliché coffins, you know. But it's a process, getting better at writing, in all forms and it did help, it certainly helped me in terms of getting up in front of a crowd.

DT: It's really odd, there aren't many art forms where you're thrust in front of a microphone and now video cameras and camera phones to be forever on YouTube at such a novice stage of your career as it were. And younger writers starting out now... so many spoken word gigs now are filmed as standard, even the open-mics. I just can't help but wonder how they're going to have a chance to get past that [developmental stage].

BV: Personally, anything that was written more than two weeks ago is my juvenilia, that's the way I see it. It's binned. It's been a long and evolving process and some of the early stuff... You know what, now I'm so far away from it, there are gigs from ten years ago that I couldn't watch at the time or relatively closely after, because my cringes would get cringes. [But] I saw a couple and yes, they are of a type of performance that I wouldn't do today but, you know, I'm not as embarrassed as I used to be about them. They've got a lyricism and a charm.

DT: Do you think it just takes time to accept that that's part of the process and you have to go through that embarrassment?

BV: I think so. I'm far enough removed now and I know who I am and what I want and what I'm attempting to achieve and all of the mistakes I've made have been a part of me getting to that place so I'm less uptight about it, you know.

DT: What's that comedy rule that trauma plus time equals funny? Maybe you just need time to pass or maybe there's so much to be embarrassed about that you just have to let some of it go?

BV: [Yes, I agree] otherwise I think I'd just be overwhelmed by embarrassment if I let it bother me.

DT: I just reconcile myself with the idea that I've done far more embarrassing things outside of writing that this is just the tip of the iceberg and [the writing] doesn't matter!

BV: Well yes and because of the nature of a lot of the work I make both in and out of art, a lot of the documentaries especially and a lot of the autobiographical 'arty' stuff... my life's an open book, I don't have any secrets. I've got a Wikipedia page that tells the world I'm a bipolar, former heroin addict, so I can't wander the world shamed by my past. It wouldn't work for me.

DT: I read [in public] for the first time at Poetry Unplugged where a lot of people in London start, currently hosted by Niall O'Sullivan that and it's been alive for 20 years. Mainly because if you Google spoken word or poetry gig in London it's the first hit and it's every Tuesday and you can go and slink around at the back come up. But I'd been in... the most recent time... spent some time on a secure psychiatric ward and been encouraged to write as part of that and I came out and saw someone doing some performance poetry and thought, "shit seems great, I wouldn't mind trying this as a way of communicating."

I think the reason I like watching you... I've seen you live once but I like watching your videos. I like the way you bridge... you categorise it as oversharing or your life as an open book while adding elements of surrealism to it and the daft elements. I found it really difficult, I couldn't add those elements at the beginning and it felt really, raw.

BV: Yeah.

DT: I think my question was supposed to be, was it a conscious effort to add the humour or surrealism?

BV: You know, political poetry is usually pretty awful and mine was no exception. I was just angry and I felt like I had a right to shout that at crowds of people and that imposing some kind of rhyming structure on it made that acceptable and it doesn't. In fact, it makes it worse. So, I'm very conscious of this and the second time around, you know, I was very conscious of anything that came out of my mouth and I wanted to be sensitive that I had an audience in front of me. I was overly sensitive about that at first and I went too far the other way and was avoiding things that I wanted to express.

Then I got to a point where I couldn't do that anymore, to just get up onstage and not say the things that I needed say. So, when that happened I went through a process of trying to make... and it was rocky, I made some bad stuff and some things I'm not very proud of, but it was essential because I really wanted to get to a point where I was making things that meant something. Which in itself is a cliché and I feel a little bit sick just saying it out loud, but also, we're in entertainment.

Primarily, everything I do is supposed to have this little journey where people have a feeling, and that might be laughter or it might be warmth and then it's flipped into something that means something else and that transition is the important bit for me. Usually these days it's fear and love, in its most basic form, you know, we're all just to some extent these frightened, destabilised people and I've got a lot to say about fear. I've got an anxiety disorder and I'm diagnosed with a panic disorder as well. I collect diagnoses like Pokémon, I have loads of them.

I believe that fear is responsible for all the terrible things in the world, anger comes from fear generally and trauma and all these things that cause great ills in society. I want to share... we all go through these things to some extent, so I want to create a sense of that through language in some way and then say, "it's all right though because we've got people, we've got each other". And I know how crass and cheesy that sounds but I would be being disingenuous if I told it any other way because that really is what I'm trying to do. So, I have to just fess up to it now I think rather than be cool and cynical about it.

DT: I've spoken a lot about this with... do you know Emily Harrison?

BV: Yes, via social media.

DT: I'm quite good friends with Emily and we talk a lot about both being diagnosed bipolar and we seem to have spent the same amount of time in hospital and have got fairly similar backgrounds... This idea of trying to speak truthfully which is partly being open and honest and I'm really open with people about my mental health issues and those of family members without being oversharing regarding other people's private life. I think the only way anyone is ever going to get understanding of this is if we all talk about it and we all share it.

But how do you how do you share it in a way that doesn't fall into the accepted narrative of how does Emily put this? 'The Good Survivor', or something like that. As if the only way you can be accepted with a mental health issue is if you've overcome it somehow and you haven't lived with it or embraced it and I think that's what I found hard putting into my writing is how you then show...

BV: Because audiences want to feel safe and people want to feel safe but I kick against that and there's a reason why, there's a lot of... I did a panel [talk] the other day and the Being A Man conference at the Southbank Centre with Jack Rooke hosting it, who is another poet and spoken word performer. There were four of us on the panel and we all kind of agreed that it's great that men are talking more about [their mental health] because that has been a hindrance in the past.

It's great that people are talking more in general about their mental health and feel free to do that but just having conversations isn't enough and I feel strongly... I work as an ambassador for some mental health services and I'm not quite sure about how I feel when things are going awry and I do feel things are going awry in that we have this very sanitised view of what mental health problems are these days.

Stick somebody 'a survivor', I hate all these terms, next to a celebrity, somebody who is... you know it's past tense but. It's not marketable, is it? Poor mental health is a messy thing and it's a cruel thing and it's upsetting and it's disturbing and it's awful but it's never sold as any of this by the charities. Of course, I understand why, they want to market things in a way that will get them money so that they can put that money in a good place and that's not a bad thing. But in terms of the art we make, we don't have to fall into that category, nobody's saying we have to. I want to tell the truth because without that, what's the point? What's the point in talking about it all? So, I do talk a lot about the smelly guts of it.

DT: I think that's what surprises me, that more people that talk about the issues don't also use surrealism because the two things go hand in hand, I feel. There's no disconnect, I think, in your work that it becomes...

BV: I'm glad you say that. It's all part the same thing to me and part those little arcs on stage that I'm trying to create they do mirror to some extent the little arcs I have when I'm not very well. You know, a journey up to mania and then the big crash back down, I might reverse it for this stage.

DT: Yeah. I suppose it depends what my mood is as I'm watching [your work] or listening to it but a couple of times it has felt like someone's recorded something from my head. That internal dialogue I think is really important but I would say also that this ties a lot into class as well because I think a lot about working class roots and how that can be expressed within an extremely middleclass art form. But this idea that to be working class is to be miserable through your art and to be mentally unstable is to be constantly miserable and that isn't my life, that wasn't my life growing up.

There was a lot of trauma of growing up, but my family also laughed a lot, I had a great time, at times, growing up. There was a lot of shit going on around it but it's just that this accepted narrative isn't recognisable to me.

BV: Because it's not our narrative, we didn't write it, that's why. Especially with class... and another thing! Especially with class, we [the working class] are ever more ostracised from the public conversation. We are becoming economically ostracised and culturally we've been ostracised, demonised as well, scapegoated, for decades now. You look at the 1980s, right, watching an advert and there'd be some northern working-class voice representing what it means to be salt of the earth, trustworthy and reliable. Now, when you get that same voice it's only ever represented puking in a Faliraki gutter or fighting in the street or doing something that is related to this 'Benefits Street', angry, stupid low-culture-narrative.

I'm all for redressing that because it's not ours, we have become a cliché but we've been painted that way. Most literary fiction is some Uni lecturer disappears to the Isle of Arran to have a big think about something there are never any working-class stories. I'm really excited at the moment about people like Jackie Hagan, do you know Jackie Hagan? And what she has to say on class.

I'm putting together a book of essays... I robbed of the idea of Nikesh Shukla... about class and I've got some great people, Jackie's one of them. There are loads of good people, the full spectrum, you know.

I've had my run-ins with the sharp end of underclass culture but you know if you're a third-generation drug dealer from a Peckham estate or if you're a lollipop lady from a Hebridean town, you're both working class but the only thing that you've got in common is the fact that your voice has no cultural capital, you know. We're a broad church, the things that we have in common, generally, are... well the one thing that we have that unites us that relates us to

poetry is we have a really incredible inventive use of language. Slang is working class and it's constantly evolving and it's a beautiful and brilliant and clever thing.

DT: I don't think we've got time to go down this route too far but... slam poetry plays no part in my writing. I don't go to slam events, I don't take part but I do spend a lot of my time defending it because I find a lot of the criticism is hugely classist and a lot of the criticism thrown at slam poets is based around the use of language and the themes that they're talking about.

But, the other side of that and one thing I do worry about with slam is that the more the BBC and other media channels pick up on it, the more that trauma narrative is rewarded. Because you are rewarded with performances at the Royal Albert Hall or prizes or the chance to get on the telly and adverts. It seems prevalent [to me] that the only narrative that the BBC can understand is one of trauma because, "of course that's what you'll be talking about because you've grown up on some estate in whatever city around the country" and it does worry me that that's what's going to be picked up on. And whilst that's a huge and important part that people have got a chance to come and talk [openly] about trauma, that is not the only thing that happens that these poetry events and I do worry about those two sides of things.

BV: Yeah. I think you're right to worry about it because, you know, they are the people that are commissioning the programs and there's a culture of head tilt, "let us let us explore your sordid past". So, there does need to be a balance to that, it's really important and it's good that you're thinking about it and that people out there are thinking about it. And more important than thinking about it is making work to counteract it, which people are doing.

DT: Absolutely, I see it all the time. It's just the annoying thing is and this is just the reality of all art forms... I know lots of promoters that are spending their whole life building something up and should the BBC... I don't mean to just keep picking on the BBC... but should they just choose to come and make a half-hour program on TV, that is what would be seen by the vast majority of people and that will be taken as what this art form is. I think it's a shame that so much good work gets ignored because it can't be packaged into the narrative that's wanted by those producers.

BV: Yeah.

DT: But I also know Radio 4 producers in Bristol who are doing a really good job of trying to show the breadth and depth of poetry in this country and they've only got a certain amount of time because there's only so much poetry that you can get on the radio, never mind the telly.

BV: It's not the money spinner I hoped it would be, poetry.

DT: We were lied to Byron!

BV: Where are my riches? Where's my rock 'n' roll lifestyle?

DT: Actually, talking about the radio, I suppose that's quite a good point to talk about the documentary work that you have done and most recently was the fantastic programme, 'The Glasgow Boys' maybe we could just chat about how these opportunities come up? Do you feel like that's a complete diversion in your career or is it still part of what you do as an artist?

BV: There's always been an element of autobiography and there's always been an element of talking about myself in public, so I guess not in that sense. You know, I am addressing a lot of my own personal history and I feel very lucky, in a way, that I get to address the stuff that I'm passionate about in documentaries on the radio.

DT: You've recently come back to spoken word after having a break. Has that mainly been working with charities in these organisations and radio producers?

BV: Yeah, for five years I've been making theatre. I direct theatre, I work a lot with the BAC [Battersea Arts Centre], I've worked with a youth company Homegrown and directed stuff there. I'm currently working on several plays and I made radio... bits and bats... you know, I'm a sort of jack of all trades, master none really. That's my thing. Again, it comes a little bit back to personal history, I never really had a proper job, I'm 42 now and I don't really know where my life's going or what I'm supposed to be doing.

I do enjoy the work I make, I really enjoy it and I do feel privileged to be able to do it but it's not any real coherency to it. You know, I'm going to make more documentaries and some people know me from making documentaries, some people know me for doing spoken word stuff. But who knows what will happen in the future?

DT: This is partly thinking about [class]... I'm always worried that... Part of being diagnosed as being bi-polar is always wandering around wondering when people are going to find me out and that this [metaphorical] curtain is going to be pulled back and everyone's going to go, "oh yeah, we knew it was bullshit all along"... but it's really heavily ingrained in the writing [process] as well...

But I wonder if it's also tied in with the fact that I didn't finish school, I was allowed back to do a few GCSEs and then I went and did the carpentry apprenticeship, so I've got no literature background other than I read all the time and I love literature. But I think because I didn't do A-levels and then I didn't go to university and I didn't choose literature in that way, I don't feel pinned to it either. Does that play into how you define your career?

BV: Not only do I not feel pinned to it but I don't feel like I belong in it, either and I feel that way about a lot of things. Less and less so, I guess, as the years go by but there's still an element of, "what am I doing here?" If I'm sat in Random House [Penguin Publishing's main office] or something, I get giddy but also trying to play it cool. Though, almost everywhere I go I feel like that because I feel like an interloper in most places.

DT: Yeah that's definitely something that resonates with me. I suppose the reason I jumped into podcasting was because I didn't really think about whether I had a background in broadcasting or journalism because I was already pretending to be a poet so it didn't matter if I pretended to be something else.

BV: That's exactly how I feel.

DT: Maybe because I served an apprenticeship, I'm very concretely a tradesman, I'm a carpenter and [because of] that working-class hangover I still find it hard to introduce myself as anything else. Even if I'm at Random House or if I'm meeting the Arts Council or meeting a group of publishers. It's funny, if we do a roundtable introduction, I always feel like I should introduce myself as a joiner or mention the fact I've got a City & Guilds certificate at home.

BV: But, that's the thing, I've never done anything real so I don't [even have that]. My friend Karen McKlusky calls it the 'terror of error', the fear of failure or the feeling that I'm supposed to succeed at something. Nobody expected me to do anything good, you know, so everything's a bonus to me. So, I don't have fear of failure, so there are positives as well. I am able to throw myself into a situation that might intimidate other people because I don't have any expectations about the outcome.

DT: Maybe because I don't have any training in journalism or broadcasting I find myself, rather than asking questions I make assumptions and then allow the guest to completely knock it back... but in my mind, it seems like that constantly battling and trying to prove yourself as an artist, is almost the same thing as trying to work with 'at risk' people. When you're working for a charity and trying to engage these people in something.

When I've been feeling well and I've been involved with outreach programs and just gone to talk to people, there's a similar thing going on in my head that I feel at literature events where I'm trying to convince that person I'm part of what they're feeling.

Perhaps what I'm trying to say is, does this sort of background help you when you're trying to then engage with people.

BV: I know what you're saying about... You know, you may have been in a position yourself where you're sat around in a room with some mental health professionals, trying to convince them you're sane, whilst drugged. I've been in that situation and I've been in a lot of situations in my life where I've had to 'fake it till I make it', kind. That's a real skill, I think, or I hope it is because I use it a lot. I've had to use it, I've had to pretend that I wasn't a broken, underclass, former recidivist, you know.

When I first started turning up at venues and engaging in conversation with people about things I knew nothing about and had no cultural connection with and listened to people's prejudices as well, because they didn't really know where I was from and what that meant. Yeah, all of that helps, being a lateral thinker and being able to communicate in a way that is hopefully in some way engaging to an audience is exactly the same skill as telling a psychiatrist that you're fine to get out of hospital.

DT: On the other side of that as well... because, definitely the amount of times I told youth workers school psychiatrists or whoever they were claiming to be at the time that I was fine and nothing was happening at home. That definitely plays into... I used to do a lot of

improvisational stuff on stage... You know, I can get up and tell a story for five minutes, that's easy. I could stand up for much longer if the open-mic slot allowed.

But thinking directly about The Glasgow Boys documentary. How does that, if in any way, does that allow you to engage with people. Does it at all help you engage with people afterwards or are you relying purely on the fact that you understand part of what they're going through?

BV: It's funny, I've got quite severe social anxiety and doing The Glasgow Boys, I just really enjoyed talking to those lads because it's easier for me than talking to people in the world that I actually live in. So, in that sense it was very easy and they're very open, you know, because of the journey that they're on, they're very open and empathic communicators. They don't really have many secrets and that bravery in the way that they communicate, I respect it and I try to be that way.

So, actually in that situation... and we've got a shared history, we've got a shared trauma and that's a bond, you know. I didn't have any issue talking to those guys, but other people... I mean get me in a group dynamic in a situation that I don't understand, and I don't really understand most situations, and I'm a mess. I'm much better one to one, yeah. But, yes, I can skip around things because I learnt those skills you know it wasn't unusual for me to lie to a social worker when I was younger.

DT: This whole series which has been going for three years now and is basically based on me wondering out loud how anything connects in my own life and just trying to bounce those things off other people.

BV: I enjoyed it... Sorry, to interrupt... There is a correlation and a serious one in terms of the art and those interactions and that is that I really enjoyed that fantasy space that I was creating and the narrative of what I was imagining at the time and going anywhere. It was like I was creating an avatar and I could put that person wherever I wanted to put them and they had a great life. So, there is a correlation there because it's not just writers that have had difficult pasts, I think we all as writers enjoy creating universes that we might like to exist in parts of or even ones that we're terrified of.

DT: Yeah. I suppose then maybe it's natural for some... As we were saying, not every writer comes to writing because of some form of trauma but it is probably a form of escapism for everyone, especially the live stuff and story-telling nights are almost pure escapism. But I suppose, maybe for people that have experienced that kind of trauma, for a select few then having the opportunity to tell other people's stories... You know, if you've gone so long without a voice yourself... and this is a big part what the podcast exists for is because I felt for a long time I didn't have a place to speak and it's nice now that I've got the opportunity to hand the microphone over to other people.

BV: Yes, and that's a good thing. I've got a real strong belief in the power of stories and to relate it back to The Glasgow Boys, I went into... I arrogantly demanded a meeting with the Commissioning Editor at Radio 4 and went in and said, "This is what I don't like about radio 4. It's always some middle-aged, privately educated white guy goes into an environment,

deconstructs the situation academically. Talks about it as though it's an academic situation even if it's a deeply personal situation to the people they're living in, and what I want to do is I want to enable people to tell their own stories".

"You know we can get artists in, we can get writers in to empower them and get them to tell their own stories in a way that will benefit them culturally, spiritually, economically, the whole lot. So, they are improving their lives with their own stories". And he nodded his head and was in agreement through it all and I was like, "I want a six-part strand"...

And he was nodding his head and at the end he just said, "Yeah. No, no. I agree there's a lot of that and we need to change it but you've never produced anything in your life. You'll have to work with somebody". So as a compromise I got one thing and I got to work with a producer, who I love and is a great guy. But that's my aim eventually...

I love telling stories and I'll always do it but I'm really really really really interested in empowering other people to do that. And I think you know marrying writers as mentors with people who've got a powerful story to tell...and by that, I mean the right writer as well, it's got to be somebody you absolutely gets it and who is empathic and not exploitative and not coming in with their own agenda, other than to do a nice thing, to do a good thing. Then I'm all for stories that advocate for people, you know, that advocate for people whose voices have been silenced in some way. So, I'd love to do more stuff around that.

DT: I think that's a really nice place to stop.

BV: Okay, great.

DT: We've run out of time anyway and you've got a gig to go to tonight. We'll give a quick plug to Milk which happens regularly in Bristol so if you're visiting or if you live in Bristol and you want a regular poetry night to go to then check out Milk, they're on the social media. But thank you Byron, thank you for joining us.

BV: It's been an absolute pleasure, thanks for having me.

Link:

DT: That was Byron Vincent chatting to me in Bristol. Don't go anywhere. I told you didn't I? There are poems to come. Thanks for listening.

Poems:

BV: I very briefly had the privilege of being poetry pen pals with the incredibly talented and mellifluously voiced folk singer Rachel Samani and this was my first offering in our little exchange. It's called;

WOT

And the earth split

like a nest of spider eggs

And the cheers scuttled out, as sincere as a photocopied laugh

Then with a viscose grunt

Wot was hocked and snotted

from the safe black of nothing

into the bleaching light

And the light scorched him clean

Burned the book of him

Baked the mud of love to his docile flesh until it cracked like a mocking smile

And his outsides sang in pain

And his insides trembled with not knowing

Until the furnace of his most middle-middle
coughed a junkyard of words

Each annunciation, a clumsily wielded machete

Hacking at emptiness, like it meant something

And so Wot asked Why?

And was greeted by anemic silence

And so Wot asked, why and why? and why? and why? and WHY? AND WHY?
AND WHY? AND WHY? And so on and so forth

until time and gravity answered
in a language so thick and dense
it bullied him back into dirt.

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BV: Back in about 2012 I did a project called Made Up with another poet and writer Molly Naylor. And what we did was we offered free poems and stories to anybody that wanted them so they could pass them on as gifts or have them for yourself and we did everything from tell stories about wizards to history professors whilst they drank hot Vimto in bed, to go into primary schools and this was a commission by a woman in Norwich who wanted a poem about her husband's car.

Now I'm not really a car guy but he had a Citroen D.S. and if I was going to be a car guy at then I think they are the motors that I would fetishise. This is about a;

Citroen DS

The bonnet is a shield protecting you from the modern sickness; its lines are the supreme creation of an era.

The headlights are the meticulous eyes of the first robot looking into the future from the past.

The exhaust is a sardonic goodbye.

The boot is the old suitcase in which you keep a well thumbed copy of your escape fantasy.

The bumper is a cut throat razor that has never been opened; the threat of it alone is enough.

The chrome trim is Connery as Bond, skiing down the volcanic slopes of a villain's lair.

The FM radio is a telegram, agreeing with your disappointment at the state of things.

The antenna is a 1955 Gibson Super 400 archtop.

The fuel tank is a single malt in your father's stomach.

The door handles are rabbit holes leading to adventure.

The angles are your first crush or notes in a perfect chord.

The doors are your boyhood self as batman.

The windows are a private screening of your favourite film.

The indicators are a civil 'excuse me' in a theme-pub brawl.

The odometer is the best anecdote you've ever heard.

The speedometer is a beckoning index finger.

The ignition is a toe dipped in the sea.

The spark-plug is a popping cork.

The hubcaps are rose-tinted mirrors.

The engine is a cheering crowd or the blind leap between lust and love.

The horses that power it are more mythical than bestial; they chain smoke Malboroughs and take long lunches whenever they like.

The hydraulics are a boy showing off to his big brother.

The dashboard is the face of a benevolent alien god.

The steering wheel is a tossed coin that always lands in your favour.

The passenger's seat is an invitation.

The driver's seat is a time machine.

The day is an unwritten to do list.

The sunset is your sat nav.

The accelerator is your favourite song.

The road is a Choose Your Own Adventure book.

The rear view mirror is filled with things that can wait.

Ahead of you there is nothing, or everything, whichever you prefer.

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End of transcript.

