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Episode 57: Black QTIPOC – (February 2016)

Transcript edited by Orion Hall-Turner – (22/07/2017)

Producer: David Turner – **DT**

Guests: Travis Alabanza – **TA**; SA Smythe – **SS**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner, and this is episode 57 of the Lunar Poetry Podcast. This episode has been a few months in the planning now so I'm very happy today to welcome Travis Alabanza – hello, Travis.

TA: Hey there.

DT: And SA Smythe – hello, SA.

SS: Hello.

DT: And as usual we're going to begin with my guests introducing themselves - to begin with, Travis.

TA: Hello, my name is Travis Alabanza, I'm a young, black, queer performance artist and writer.

SS: Hello, SA Smythe, slightly less young academic and poet.

DT: Thank you very much. And I've decided that we're going to begin with a poem from Travis today.

TA: Brilliant. This is called, Sing It To My Body

[The author has not given permission to reproduce this work in the transcript]

[00:03:06]

DT: Thank you Travis. Very nice. So just a couple of things to say before we start, just so the listeners know what's going on today. The main focus of discussion will centre around writers and performers that identify as QTIPOC and their place in the space afforded to them by the established poetry and spoken word scene here in Britain. And I've been - in the months planning this - screwing up and throwing away all the disclaimers that I kept thinking of putting in, but I am going start with one thing and that is that everything we talk about today will be from a personal perspective, and I've not invited SA or Travis here to speak on behalf of the community or a generation, but rather to shed some light on some very important issues based on their own experiences. And I'm sure my guests, as well as I, welcome any feedback from listeners after this discussion. And that's it - I'm not gonna make any more of those.

DT: First question - how much of your work is informed by identifying as QTIPOC?

SS: All of it because I am. I mean I'm sure you'll see - Travis, that was really beautiful-

TA: Thank you.

SS: - as always. I think- obviously I've been thinking a lot about it because I don't think I'd be here today- but in general in the last year, thinking about my creative process and my relationship to my writing, I think a lot about how explicit I am, or am not, being with my writing and upfront about... This is coming from a place of being 'X Y Z' identity, 'identitary' category. And in some ways- two minutes in, I'm already critiquing myself on my writing- stick around, it gets better. But I think, one critique I even have of my own process or a struggle that I have with my writing is that it sounds a bit closed sometimes; like, there are definitely things that I'm talking about and I'm like, "here's this explicit thing that I want to address or approach," but I- throughout my process it sort of gets a bit masked. But then the masking itself becomes kind of what I'm trying to say, if that makes any sense. But yeah, overall I think it's- I mean it's obviously central to anything I say.

TA: Yeah. I mean, I get that question a lot. My work's obviously, like, at the moment, really quite explicit. All the stuff I guess I show is very explicit. And I guess- I think I have the same

answer as SA in the sense that everything I do is going to be influenced by who I am because from the simple fact of walking to your house this morning, you know, I was looked at twice, screamed at by a kid. So it's hard to then write about some rivers and some oceans without then thinking about how this influences me walking down these streets. At the moment I'm part of a young writers' programme, and part of the critique that I had when I submitted my anthology for that was that my work was too much about the same thing.
And I was thinking about that a lot because I am trying to start showing more of my other work that maybe is less explicit. But then I was also thinking about the fact that for me, my journey to finding writing and finding poetry was to voice exactly this- the fact that I was angry and I am still angry and all these things I didn't know how to articulate that like- metaphors aren't really going to work for me like screaming about it is. If you're having an explicit incident such as being called a 'tranny' on the street, no metaphor is really going to hide or heal that for me than other just explicitly saying it.

And I think it's this thing we actually do to QTIPOC writers. We do it to ourselves, but mainly white audiences and white editors and white critics do to us. When a white man writes explicitly about love all the time and this possessive hetero idea of love that they have over this woman that they broke up with 20 years ago and they're still writing about it, no one says, "Why are you still writing about it?"

SS: Straight up, all the writers I learned about in school.

TA: I guess that's where you'd go with that.

DT: Yeah. I mean there's- I know you both pretty well and I was pretty sure I knew the answer to that question anyway. But just for clarity for the listeners, but it was also borne of the fact of this quote I read last summer by Drew Krewer which is, "I'm tired of people assuming I have some special relationship with my identity or my body just because I'm not straight."

And I wanted to go on to ask- do you think other QTIPOC writers might feel obliged to continue to return to the theme of their identity because there are so many strong and talented voices that are doing that already? This is more just a general question to any writer, you know, if you identify as anything.

TA: I guess, I guess it's an interesting quote. I guess it's hard for me to comment on someone else's process of writing. Definitely. I think we all have really different relationships to our sexuality, our gender, our race. And I think even having not a relationship with our sexuality, gender, and race is a relationship in itself, especially if we're in a world that tells us anything that's not straight isn't the norm. Then to have a relationship that you don't see it as something that's vocal to you, is a relationship because you've maybe got to that. I think the idea of feeling pressure to write about something- I think that's somewhat true in the sense that sometimes- I don't know- for me I actually feel the pressure sometimes to not speak about certain things. I guess I can't speak for other people's process. But I think that we all have pressures of what we feel we need to write and what we feel we need to look like on stage and I think that, or on paper. So I don't know, I think that's tough, I don't know, what do you think, SA?

SS: I agree, which I suspect will be a common refrain. I don't want to get contentious. I generally think- I mean, I agree. I also heard the quote, and I was like, "huh." I almost wonder if it's true or false. But, you know, it's more or less true but it's sort of missing the bigger picture. Yes, it

may be true that that is a feeling that occurs but I think that feeling can also be external. People will see you as "other" and expect you to speak on that otherness. But then also I think- and this is more speaking for myself because I too can't speak for anyone's process- but I think my obsessions and my own writing come- sure, from a place of otherness and marginalisation, but also because I want answers for myself. You know what I mean? It doesn't actually have anything to do with other people.
I mean, to an extent, because it's like, "I keep coming back to these issues of gender identity, sexuality, performance, masculinity, etc." because I don't have any answers, precisely because there are other that I want to figure them out and I need to keep going back to writing. So sometimes that exhaustion- I feel it. And I want to project and say it's because people are making me write about these things, I can't get any play if I don't write about anything but these things, but also, I need the answers. And when they become banal or when they become commonplace and I've answered them, if that ever happens, then I think I'll be too bored to continue, and so will other people because society would be in a different place, not me, if that makes sense.

DT: Travis and I first discussed having this conversation last summer, wasn't it? Early last summer, and I mentioned the word activism, and we both cringed because I knew it wasn't quite the right word. But for activism, what I mean at this point is educational protest or community work. I'd like to talk about the elements of activism in both of your writing. How aggressive do you still feel you need to be in your work in order to educate audiences or to get messages across.

SS: I don't know how aggressive I feel I have to be. I want to say that I am very aggressive and I embrace it. And again not necessarily in the harshness or expertness of how I write. But really- we've talked about this before and I think about it often- being misread and how you can't write or speak your way out of that to a certain extent. So if I'm on stage or if I'm sharing my work- textually and other media- I'm going to do my best to insist that you don't read it any way besides the way that I want. And that can be read as aggression.

DT: I- actually, just before you answer, Travis- that raises a good point. I think there's a tool used by white cis men to accuse people of aggression as if it's the- as if it’s a bad thing. Sorry, I probably just took the words right of your mouth. I’ll shut up.

SS: Way to defeat my punchline, David.

DT: What I mean more by ‘aggression’ is forthrightness.

SS: Yeah, I don't know, part of my answer is- I mean, my answer still stands, but I also- to take on this nuance, I think, I don't know. I think- and again this goes back to what I initially said- I think there's some part of me in the way that I write that is a little bit masked, and sometimes I wonder if maybe, between me and my journal, if that's just because I'm actually not fully ready to embrace the radical fullness that is myself; not even about my writing or how other people are reading it but really to reveal to myself and then have others be a part of that witnessing. So- so that's on the one hand. On the other hand, aggression meaning forthrightness, I think a lot of people know what I'm talking about because it's for them, and not for people who don't know what it's about, or can't pass the lines even if it's metaphorical. It's not for them anyway, so it may seem less aggressive or less direct or less speaking to a truth. But it wasn't theirs anyway, so it doesn't matter to me.

TA: Yeah. And I think- I like that you use the word aggression because I think we should be real in

the words. The people that are looking at us and not using like, "oh, they were very forthright!" Like, they're saying, "look at that aggressive trans kid on stage shouting at me!", right? So I like that you used aggressive and I think also we should note the difference that a lot of - I don't know, correct me if I'm wrong, SA - a lot of your work is on text, and to be read, right? Which carries a different kind of aggression. And it gets them- both are resistance, and a lot of the time my work is on stage and mixed with different performance elements. And I think even if my work was talking about some calm sea or ocean- I keep going to all these white ideas of poetry. I don't know! But GCSE anthologies are like- "let's talk about trains and seas." So, say if I even went on stage and started doing this- art school, or- I can't swear on here, can I- art school piece about the sea. That- even if it was the calmest piece ever with tranquil music- just my body on that stage would be seen as aggressive.

The fact that I'm going around in the past month has been- I've been performing in all these white spaces with white support acts, for me then to headline them? That's an aggressive act because this white queer scene, this white art scene is not made for me. So I'm aggressively putting myself on there. I think for me, I have to be aggressive, outwardly. I don't have to be, I want to be. But it's my protection, right? There's certain gigs I do when it's just QTIPOC or when it's a safer space. But everyone comes back, saying, "Oh, you gave a different energy there!" And it's because, I think, as a performer, I have different elements- my background's in performance and I'm using poetry as part of my performance. And I think that- for example, I'm really excited- tonight, I'm performing at a library gig that Rudy Loewe's organising, and it's going to be majority QTIPOC. And I can't wait to read some work that I will never probably read anywhere else at any other gigs that I'm doing this month. And that'll still be aggressive because aggression is part of me. But where's that aggression to, I think? I don't know. Actually no, it wouldn't be aggressive. I think it would be totally healing and calm.

But that aggression that everyone projects to on stage- I think I actually had someone come up to me after the show and was like, "you were so fierce. But not other peoples' fierce, angry fierce. Like, I was scared of you on stage," and it's this white queer person, and I went, "good, I'm glad," because I want them to be. Because the only people I want in the audience really when I'm on there to feel any kind of love for me, to feel any kind of "I wanna snap my fingers at you," is the QTIPOC in the room. And if anyone else gets anything from it then that's a bonus for them. But really, like- so I don't know. I love my aggression, I don't think I could survive without this fire and anger in me, like it's a protection. Maybe I'll grow into finding a more- maybe when I'm a bit older there will be a more useful way for me to project myself, but at the moment, fuck it.

DT: So last summer when we discussed this, Travis, you also raised an important point about the difference between activism and aggressive, or otherwise, directed towards people that may be oppressing, and activism which aims to support a community. Do you feel like at the moment that- we'll talk about poetry rather than performance stuff- but do you think this balance is right at the moment, or would you like to see more people writing in a way- in a more supportive way?

TA: I think I meant- I was talking about how there are sometimes times for community building and community work and what does it look like if your work is constantly focusing on white- I think I was trying to decentre whiteness in my work. In my work, if I don't take stock and think, "when is my work community building and what is my work doing for the queer black poor kid reading this?" If it's just- if it's bouncing straight off them but it makes the white man really angry at me, then is my work building anything community wise? So I think I've thought about that a lot so that's why I started writing Stories of a Queer Brown Muddy Kid which is a much more text based

story book. And I've read- I wrote- I made it in the idea that this is for no one's sake other than to create and heal. So I tried to take that anger that will always be there and put it into more- into words the community feels. I think at the time we were talking I was feeling of disconnection with what community means. And I was seeing a lot of culture that was creating a lot of anger and it's really hard because we are told not to police anger, but at the same time I was thinking, "when does this anger create love in the community, for me?"

So yeah, I think sometimes there's a way of getting that anger into love. But I guess it's who you're directing that love to, like I can always be angry every white guy, and no one can tell me not to. And it's what I wanna do. I want to also find that anger and channel it into love for other kids like me.

SS: Am I allowed to- I'm gonna ask a question. So do you think that- obviously, this was last year and I wasn't a part of that conversation- do you think now it's gotten better in terms of- how you've orientated yourself has made it better in terms of your community practice or your community-building? Have you seen a community being formed in a more concrete way because you've changed?

TA: I think if I redefine community to fit the brief, I've seen people around me and my friends- because community is friends, right? Before I was looking at this broader sense of community that I was building on this ideal that we could create. And I still think we can, I think it just takes a bit more work. But around me what I've seen is a lot less- when I'm in my downtime now with other queer black friends that chill with me at uni or chill with me at home, I've started realizing that what are we spending our time doing? Are we spending 100 percent of our time being super super angry talking about how white people have fucked us up? Or are we spending some of that time how it's needed like, "how was your day?" "Ah! This happened, this happened. Some person said this to me." Great. And then we're spending 75 percent watching some great movies, chilling back, making some good food, talking about our mums. So I've seen it redirected in my personal life. Whether or not I've seen that translate into a wider social community? I don't know.

DT: I just want to go back to something you said earlier, SA, about your work being for other people of colour in that what you would write- not exclusively, but you write as yourself and talk to other people who identify in the same way. What I was wondering was that, is there a situation now where it's easier as a young person of colour to get up and do an angry poem because that's what white audiences understand? They understand that form of aggression. If you get up and do something that's community-based and love-based that only other people of colour can understand there's a chance a white audience will go, well, because they think that- because there's an assumption everything should be directed towards them, and every poem- every form of poetry should be understandable to them- that there would be a disconnect and then it would seem as if that form of poetry's failing when it's not. It's just not speaking to those people in that room. Does that make sense? I don't know.

SS: It does make sense but I have no idea how to answer it. Precisely because I don't- I don't- I mean, I already outed myself in the beginning of this as an academic as well. I think that's an interesting- not that you're not, Travis, but this interesting difference in that I have- in the amount of media I have… I mean, Travis said they- sorry, I'm gonna phrase it wrong- poetry is a part of performance. Performance is where you come from, and I'm the opposite, if there is an opposite in a binary way, and I think- precisely because I have an array of different text-based ways to communicate, and also that, to be fair, give me legitimacy. But I don't really think about it. I mean

I'll tell you in my academic sphere lots of what I write is just not intelligible anyway because it's not Anglophone. It's not heterosexual, it's not cis- it's not- it's not a lot of things even in the areas in which I'm writing. And it works the same in my poetry, which I've been trying to do in the last year or so- take text-based things and try to perform them and figure out how to make them performance-based things and not text-based things and see what changes and what stays the same. The last thing in all of that internal creative process that I'm thinking about is really, "is this legible to white people?" I can't tell you, and I also- so I just don't know. I don't think my anger manifests itself in as explicit- I don't even know how to use- explicit's not even the word, because I can't even tell you how many times I- I don't even know what to say because this is recorded- I hope it's really clear for whoever interacts with me, the depths of my pro-blackness, let's put it that way. But even my phrasing it this way has nothing to do with white folk- it literally has nothing to do with white people.

So when I'm writing or performing and standing up I can't even- I barely make eye contact with the audience in general, let alone do I think, "was this gotten by a certain kind of people?" Because I know affectively it's almost a different kind of body language or there's another language at play that the people I want to get it, get it, even if- even if we have a different class or nationality or other kinds of things. I think there's a generosity that almost- I don't wanna say in spite of ourselves but almost because of the resistance that we have had to live. I don't know, that was a long answer but, yeah.

TA: No, that was real. You can also tell when you're listening to someone. Yeah, you can- you just know, if someone's there, who they're there for sometimes. I think I haven't reached that stage yet. I can be super honest- I haven't reached that stage where I'm performing in front of an audience and sometimes I don't catch myself thinking, "what is that Tom and John going to think?" in there. I'm not- I think I thought I was, I really thought I was like, "Yo, this is just for me and this is just for other queer black people," and then just came back to London after the holidays, and my first gig was in this Soho gay bar and it was- I didn't see one person of colour. Also, I didn't really see one woman there? Or a person that I was viewing or reading as a woman, there. And it reminded me that like, "oh, you still care, you're still scared by them, you still wonder what they think," because I've never been so nervous and that really was a good time to check myself, like, "you think because you're performing this hella explicit ode to queer blackness you still don't have this internalised shit," that sometimes means I've gotta work through, that I'm still nervous about what they think. So that's definitely been something I've been working on and it's something I definitely strive to achieve. To know that actually, this white idea of credibility, this white idea of what we deem as respectable poetry, what we deem as a good performance, it doesn't mean anything to me. Publication, any of that? It doesn't mean anything to me, and it's about saying that out on the air, to then learn how to make that 100 percent like it doesn't mean 'ish'.

DT: So the quote that I mentioned earlier from Drew Krewer was taken from the anthology "Troubling the Line". And it talks academically about what the editors describe as trans and genderqueer poetics. And I just wanted to ask you both what that phrase means to you, if anything at all. Because to me, the phrase itself is confusing- just an issue I thought of- we don't have to get hung up on this actual point because we can go on and talk about other things, but just that phrase itself.

TA: Trans and genderqueer poetics. It doesn't really mean anything to me, probably because I've not researched where it came from or who it is, but also because I'm quite bad with labelling types of things like that. I don't know, maybe my poetics are quite gender-fucking-queer!

SS: Gosh, yeah. I also was Publishing Editor for a trans journal. And so I, last year, was a part of it, being part of the discussion of what gets put in and why, and talking through the pieces. And I think there is something- I think maybe there is something to the term but I also want to reflect or raise up, again, that I am an academic and so labels- gosh, I love them, and as much as I want, you know, she, them and have- is it construction, deconstruction, post-redeconstruction? There's always genealogy of terms, or the genealogies of terms; I'm already doing it now. And maybe it doesn't have actual purchase in the world of my lived experience. So basically, the same thing as what Travis is saying, perhaps. I don't know. If identity politics weren't a trap- I'll say that every time I can. Every time. If there were not some sort of debt that I would eventually have to pay whether I know it or not- affective, or some kind of debt, then I would freely, willingly go with a term like that. But I think that there is and I'm not sure what it is yet. And so I'm suspicious but then I also think that, by nature, being a QTIPOC person and one who writes poetry, ipso facto I'm- I'm ascribed to as queer, genderqueer, or trans poetics. Yeah. I should shorten my answers.

DT: It definitely coloured the way I read the book, this phrase kept floating in. Every time I read a poem it was- it was trans and genderqueer poetics. That was what I trying to- it really- I mean, it is the point of the anthology, but I think when you state things like that in the beginning of a collection it really does influence the way you then view each piece and each writer.

TA: I guess that's that author's purpose in doing that and giving this name to it before you read these poems, so I guess it just depends on whether or not- I prefer to switch here, I'm a transgender nonconforming person writing poetry, rather than- I don't know! Again, I'm not very good with those terms, I'm not really academic.

SA: It's about power, as well- thank God it's- I think- but I think it's definitely about power. And I want to- what's coming to mind as well is a lot of- disability rights or 'crip' movements, as they use those terms, and it's like, "a disabled person" or "person with a disability". How you shift the power of the label and the terminology and who has agency in that term. And I think, yes it's true that that's the purpose of the editor / author writing this anthology, framing this anthology, but I think it just makes it super transparent that the act of framing an anthology or editing a volume is to situate yourself at the top of a hierarchy or at the centre of an axis of power that doesn't really speak to me in this moment. So, yes, they say, "here's a showcase of these kinds of things," but what it does is it chips away a bit, or draws power away from individual works. If you're doing precisely what they wanted you to do, it's not an accident, you're right. That you're like, "Okay, I've read this thing. Let me figure it out on its own terms." And also, I guess this is trans poetics. Violence is sometimes an overused word but I think that's- the violence of anthologisation is making something speak for something other than itself.

DT: It seemed like they were trying to do the right thing in that they were unashamedly putting together an anthology of work by trans and genderqueer writers. But it sort of 'over-academicises' the collection, perhaps. And just on the side, I don't know if you saw it yesterday, there was a piece on the Guardian website about whether the phrase "person of colour" should be something they use now, and the main thing that came out of it really was that perhaps they shouldn't have a middle-aged white guy discussing it!

TA: That's a sound conclusion to make.

DT: We were talking about labels... But it's just a really odd piece of about eight hundred words

which sort of didn't go anywhere, didn't say anything. Definitely didn't need to happen.

TA: Sounds like The Guardian.

DT: But I think the reason I wanted to talk about the phrase also, about whether it is a kind of poetics, and what that means, is because then reading the anthology, it sort of made me think, well, I'll try and analyse this poetry in some way and try and find returning themes and identify returning imagery and stuff... but then- is that just not what's synonymous with the problem with established publishing routes, is that what you don't want or don't need in that situation is cis men going through that kind of writing and trying to work out what's being said, or how this work should be read.

SS: Well, I'm curious to hear what you have to say about this, Travis. Because my initial- the consternation you read on my face was more, "well, why wouldn't you want to read it?" I think, and this is part of what I mean with identity, I understand that there's purchase and there's a value when there's youthfulness and also ability to oppress. But I also- it's a little bit concerning sometimes when some folks I know who live under the guise of allies, and they wear it as an identity, which- don't!

TA: Real.

SS: Because it's not. I think they may come to a similar tendency of, why I, of X Y Z identitary categories, shouldn't be viewing X Y Z or A B C body of work and- trying to figure it out. But isn't that literally the problem? Isn't the problem that there's a system of those systemic oppressions, and the structures converge to oppress certain kinds of bodies and certain kinds of people, and the people who either unwittingly live under those things or less maliciously live under those structures go about the world and say, "well, that's different, and I don't understand it, and I can keep going about my life and keep thriving and never have to really understand it." I think in a certain sense I'm more for the 'FUBU' - For Us, By Us - because that's what we've been saying…

But on the other hand, or an extension of that same hand, I definitely think a cis white dude who picks up a trans anthology and tries to read it is like, "oh- oh, I don't- I have no idea, what- what are they saying? This doesn't speak at all to my experience." And A) that's okay, and B) there's something beautiful here, C) there's something powerful here that deserves to thrive and live, and even if you don't act on- that person doesn't even act or move forward on that, and just lets people live, in this case QTIPOC or trans people, that's literally leaps and bounds from what the systems of oppression have been doing for the last millennia.

TA: Yeah, I think it's interesting, because I think when I put any work out there, although my intention of who it's for is very much in my head, and I have to be so aware that that's not going to be the only person reading it. So which means that when I put my work out there I have to think about that and I have to remember that. And that means that like… I think- where there's this, "oh, we'll use this cis white dude as this epitome of like-" but obviously there's other nuances of people that aren't going to get my work but this cis white dude's reading my work, they understandably don't get it... Can they then not analyse my work and stuff like that? Yeah, I think they can, I think the danger is in- if they then project their outward opinions to the world about my work without recognising that they are coming at it from a whole different book on a different bookshelf. So it's what happens when those white voices that are more respected in white poetry scenes then comment on this trans anthology publicly. That's when I have an issue, because their

voice and their power and their opinion will be so much more valid than the opinion of all the trans kids that absolutely found love and amazing power in that work.

Do I think that means they can't read it and analyse what they're thinking and why they're thinking it? Not at all. I think it's really helpful, a lot of my cis friends, when I started coming out to them a bit more internally and less publicly, when I did it for them a couple of years ago- or did it for me, but with them, we started reading a lot of- we all create art and we started showing a lot of art and stuff like that. And my art really helped them break down some of these binary views they had of gender. If they didn't sit with that work, and look at it, and think about it, and analyse it as cis people, they wouldn't have been able to understand as well their really good friend. So, I think, going back to SA's point, if this person reading this trans anthology means that the next day they're not going to shout at me on the street then, freaking read my work!

SS: And not only that, I was saying that- as speaking from the point of view of the consumer, and you're also speaking as the publisher or the person with more power for that work to circulate. And to bridge that, I don't want them to just read it, I want them to buy it. I want them to put their cis white male dollars on the line because they have more capital to circulate than the average trans QTIPOC person. So that's what I mean: when people are like, "well, this is not for me. It's not for the space." I think, actually, sure, it's not for you, you can still support it! And please do support it so that we can thrive. Your opinions aren't really gonna be what matters to me or anything, but your money really does.

DT: I think that's the point I was trying to make, is that of course these anthologies should be open to be read and analysed by anyone, because that's what poetry is for and about. But there's too much of a natural leap for a lot of people to then question how it's speaking to them directly without saying, "am I the intended other side of this conversation?" And even if you're not the intented other side of the conversation, it absolutely doesn't exclude you then from reading and- because it isn't- I completely agree, Travis, that it is an amazing resource to use to help people, give people an insight into what people are thinking, and that's what's beautiful about poetry in general.

TA: And I'm just gonna add, also, that it's fun! I want to bring the word 'fun' into this. So- I've had some of my most- reading poetry can also be super, super fun, and funny, and QTIPOC can also be really hella funny. And I've had some- a big transformative experience for me was- it's coming up to about two or three years ago now, when I spent some time in Oakland around QTIPOC. It was the first time I'd been around just QTIPOC for a really long time, and there was a really amazing group of like, fat black women that use the word 'fat' to describe themselves and they were queer, they were fat, they were black, and they made poetry together, right? None of this is something that I can at all relate to as someone that's not a woman, and isn't fat. And they were also all dark skin, right? And that poetry was so, so fun and amazing and I enjoyed watching them. Whilst it wasn't for me, I enjoyed it but I also learned so much.

And I think that's what's really important. Just because something is not for you, doesn't mean you can't also really enjoy it. And I think we are used to that, we can- we have to, as QTIPOC, we have to watch TV shows, movies, stuff like that, and sacrifice it not being for us and sometimes still enjoy it. Now I don't enjoy it as much but when we're young and growing up, we have to enjoy all these shows that aren't for us- we don't have to, but we do. Otherwise there's nothing to watch on TV. But as soon as a cis white dude has to watch something that's not for them, they're like, "nope, this isn't for me, can't do it. I'm not going to the cinema. Not doing any of it, not reading

these books." And it's like, no! We're hella funny! And we're cute, so...

SS: We're cute!

TA: Black don't crack!

SS: I just… "Black don't crack"... No, I think that's very true. And I think Toni Morrison once said something like that as well, around the time that she won the Nobel Prize for literature. And I think it's not only that we had to, but it's like, "here's some reverse racism for the white people out there who think that that's a thing." I think that it also speaks of the capacity for black, trans QTIPOC folk to have a greater imagination and a greater sense of empathy. And I also think that's one that's necessary, based on resistance and resilience and all these things, but it's necessary to thrive, or just exist, in this current state of oppressions in which we're… sort of confounded in. We have to see and imagine that this is not all there is.

You have to see... I don't know, Columbo, just to put myself there… and, growing up whenever, we have to watch the things that we watch and say, I can see, affectively or related to emotions, this person or this experience is one that I can get behind. I can see their story because what I'm living in- I mean, it has to be some sort of story, it can't be the reality that we're destined to otherwise, I think- or resistance is really futile and lost.

DT: I think next, I want to go on to discuss publishing and promotion of poetry, but maybe we can take a poem from SA before that?

SS: Oh, what? Okay. This poem is called, You Cannot Ordain the End of Times of Disillusion With the Wave of Your Hand.

[The author has not given permission to reproduce this work in the transcript]

[00:41:14]

DT: Thank you very much.

SS: Thank you.

DT: I'm gonna ruin the mood now and ask some questions again. You've got me all relaxed. I just wondered- both of you- what your views are on the barriers, when it comes to getting published, for QTIPOC writers.

TA: Okay. Yeah. I'll give SA some time. I think for me, one of the main barriers is language, and class, and who we see, invisibility, and I could talk about them all for ages. But instead I want to focus on the fact that being from a council estate, being from a really working class background and single-parent family and then having your first introduction to poetry being your GCSE anthology means that your first idea of poetry is that it's not for you. And then figuring out that you like rhyming and you're like, "you know, that's my first introduction to poetry." Everyone says, what was my first introduction to poetry? It was walking down to the green by my shops and hearing the people four years older than me spit bars at each other and call each other

"wasteman". That was the best poetry because I then took that into the school. And we would have rap battles in the middle of the playground, we would spit bars at each other. And that was my poetry. But that was the poetry that was banned from the classroom, if teachers caught you doing that you would get told off.

So already, before I even decided that I wanted to write, before I even formulated my idea that this would ever be something I could do, I'm told my earliest examples of rhythm and rhyme and making words up and having fun, which is what poetry is, is wrong and not allowed in the classroom, especially not the English classroom. I'll never forget my English teacher telling us all off for spitting bars outside a classroom. And the irony of us then walking in and then learning about poetry. And she just told a group of black kids to not make rhymes, and these rhymes are sick, these rhymes are quick, these rhymes are funny, these rhymes are fast. They're funny… So I think the earliest example of- obviously this then just continues, this constant blockage of, "you are not allowed in."

That's what it is. But it starts so young that when we start getting these programs for 19 to 24-year-old black kids in these institutions like the Barbican and the Battersea Arts Centre, they're great, and they're super, super important, but it starts so young in the sense that, from a young age, we are not shown in our curriculum, in what's shown on TV, that poets look like anything but a slightly overweight, grey-haired white man. And then sometimes this white girl. So it really comes from this access. And then the language- Sorry, I have so many thoughts about this, because at the moment I am dealing with this barrier of being asked and questioned and 'building for publication', whatever that means. And then I'm on this barrier of being in these workshops that are prepping me to put something forward.

And it's so interesting seeing what the editors are correcting me on, because they're all these things like form, grammar, spelling, all these things that I was told, in my bars, when I was spitting, did not matter. So all these rules and what we're placing importance on? I write by a different form, my form is not iambic, my form is not like this sonnet, my form is how quick can we spit a bar and make sure that the punchline still hits. So it's by redefining- in order to get this access to QTIPOC, and I'm speaking from a specifically working class background, we've gotta just reshift even the language that we're using. It pisses me off so much, sorry.

SS: Yeah, word. I mean- I think- I wholeheartedly agree, to the point where I forgot the question, I was so enraptured in what you were saying. But it's- in terms of publishing, I used to work in publishing also, at the feminist press in New York under its early- just an Italian publishing press. And I want to speak- I think there are a lot of issues and I have sometimes a real impulse and just want to set it on fire. But I also think you can have an abolitionist vision but then know that things still need to get done in the moment. You still need to be heard in those 19 to 24- and younger, especially younger- because you're super right, that it starts incredibly early, how you perceive your self-worth and how that's reflected from society. They need to know that they have a voice, and have their voice heard and circulated and have that matter. I think Travis's answer should definitely stand on this one, especially because you're embroiled right in the centre of it, at these intersections of the moment.

But I, too, want to impress how fundamentally important and relevant the question of access is. It's not just like, "oh, these people want to get their poems heard," it's not- absolutely, it's not that. It's when my three-year-old nephew who has some sort of creative spark- and I see the fear that grips my sister, and grips me also, now he's getting to the age of going into school, now he's

going to be out in the world, so he can't be a carefree- he can't just be like, tutus and crayons which is literally always- every time you see him, crayon in one hand, tutu somewhere near his person or on one of his toys. And I think that fear is something that access would assuage, and I don't really have an answer except playing the identity game, you know? Putting QTIPOC folks in charge, putting us in charge of telling our own stories, and that's something that every group really says. And I think that that's true.

TA: I'm gonna- I'm sorry, I have so much to say on this. And I wanna- it's that fear, right? And I wonder if, when a white man from a well-off background decides that they want to be an artist, if there's any fear. There maybe is because of how we view art, but not that same comparison to me- me coming out to my mum as wanting to be a creative was way harder than coming out as queer, or any of the other things I've had to tell my mum.

SS: You can be trans but a lawyer, still...

TA: Right, exactly! I can be trans but still getting money! And the fact that I was getting good grades, and I said, "no, I want to create," my mum was like, "we're poor! What are you doing?" And I think this is the problem. Not only is it- we know the wider- in a general sense- that arts isn't a problem. But so much of that is, who can take the risk to go to art school? I'm still at King's College London having an awful bloody time with my degree because, because I got those grades, I still needed to go to an academic institution. I could never have applied to drama school. And it's because- and that's not my mum's fault. My mum is doing good parenting and being the best and that's the institution and access telling us that we're not allowed in.

But also that, if you get there, you're never really going to get to this because we can't see any publications or anything saying that you're credited. So places need to start just- literally, I see so many of these poetry journals and they put one person of colour on their whole list of publishing that whole year or whatever- and normally they're- they're not normally black and they're normally South Asian, and the topic they're normally talking about is very directly and obviously related to their identity. It's this thing we've all heard before. They're never talking about queerness, they're never talking about anything else. And I just think that it needs to be shaped up. And sorry, I'm not even giving articulate answers.

SS: No, I think that's super valid, and again you're just right. There's nothing else to really say on top of this, except to further note that- and not obvious- I mean intersectionality is a thing and it's important, and I think that's part of what we're talking about here. Because you're speaking from a working class background, and I also think there was, decades ago- and I can only know this factually, but I note that it was spoken about when two white people recently died, Alan Rickman and David Bowie, both white national treasures, global white treasures, beauties... Great, but when they were saying they went to- people noted that they went to working class schools and were from working class backgrounds and they were able to go to art school, and I think that- that wasn't really a shock.

There was more access then; there still was not access for gender non-conforming people of colour. I mean, it's still- it's still terrible... not allowed to curse on this, but I think that access- the disparity has been even greater. So people can lament and say, "oh, working class people are still having a hard time of it in general," but I think you're so right, the point that you're making out in terms of the domestics, in terms of family life. Sure, in a class sense, the disparity- class warfare is real and it's rampaging throughout Britain even more than it's ever been before, I think. But I

think, or I wonder, how do you also grapple with that family. Because the respectability politics in my family have always been incredibly strong. But I'm cringing at even talking about it that way because I wonder if it's respectability politics, because my family literally came from zero things, from sharecropping Caribbean and Central America-type lifestyle, and then got on that boat and were like- people are going to be okay, our family's gonna be okay. We're going to wear this bowtie, wear this hat, we're going to go to church on Sundays, we're going to do these things and then we're gonna try to get our children into good schools so they can have a profession or they can have a family, so it's survival.

And then it gets warped and there's a respectability element to it. But I think- and this is, I'm just sort of riffing and thinking out loud- but I'm also thinking, Travis, about what you were saying, not just then, but also in terms of community, or the greater community and where it starts, and I think also on a pro-black tip, if you go back to our communities or we stay within our communities and work within our families, and be like, it's okay to want to be creative and have all these other kinds of expressions because black people have been doing nothing but being creative. Our existence is literally the most creative thing I can think of. It's the most miraculous thing, it's the most creative thing, it's the most aesthetically original thing that I have- literally, I can even imagine. And I think if we exercise, in some ways, as impossible as it sounds, outside of a system, radical black love and pro-blackness at its core and throughout, sustain that shit; I think, from that big lens to a small lens it would be really easy for a new QTIPOC up-and-coming child to say, "mum, I'm going to be a dancer. I'm going to be a performer. And that's what's up." And that person to go, "well, we're black, that's what we do. This is how we express ourselves. This is our history. So you go ahead and be a dancer, you be the best dancer," and also simultaneously work towards a collective dismantling of a system that's like- not only could you not be a dancer but if you're going to be a dancer you're going to starve. And your family can't thrive.

DT: Just coming back to one point you made, Travis, about what- you wonder if the white middle class guy fears going to art school. I think what they feel is excitement and confuse it for fear, because I don't think- if you're talking about the financial situations, I don't think people who have never actually had to worry properly about where money is coming from… of course, you could never understand that. I mean, I did a ridiculous thing where- I've got really supportive parents and I come from a proper working class white family in south London, but I went off and qualified as a carpenter before I went to art school because I wanted to have a trade so people wouldn't worry about me. So I've just got my trade under my belt, and then I was free to go off and do what I wanted and no one worried because I could just- once the art stuff fell through the floor, I could go back to a proper job. Look at me now! Look at me now!

TA: This is what this 'bougie' degree is for, it's the fact that it gives- I picked the wrong subject to get credibility, but I'm at a bougie place, because that means when I then plan to try and live and sustain as a community person and working as an artist, I can go back to my family and be like, "But if worst comes to worst, I went to King's College London! It has a really huge imperial, colonial history and look at its big pillars." So it's impressive.

SS: So many columns.

TA: Yeah, so many columns, which means it must be impressive. So, it's like- it's a different way, obviously, the trade, it's that same thing, right? A lot of people in my family are all working in trade and that is how you sustain and survive. So I totally feel you, gotta do something at first to keep them happy.

DT: My next question- this might be more for Travis to answer, but similar question to publishing, but more aimed at spoken word events; are there any consistent mistakes that people are making in terms of safe spaces for trans folk? And, go.

TA: Yeah, of course. Common mistakes include- I'm performing a lot at the moment so I could probably turn this into a poem. In fact, I'm going to listen to this back to remind me to do a poem for this. Common mistakes include me being the only person of colour on a really, really, really, really, really big line-up. Common mistakes include misgendering right before you go on stage; misgendering, I think, is something that's going to naturally happen to me a lot of times in my life. However, if you are hosting me and you've read my bio, just fricking ask –

SS: Just ask! Or read the lines, it's three lines. It says it on there! "Travis Alabanza, they do this". What? Pronouns!

TA: Right? So to have to- a common mistake is misgendering, and it sounds like this thing- I think, because we hear about misgendering so often, we don't actually often talk about the real effects that it can have. And that's a different effect. Depending on when I'm misgendered depends on how much of an effect- and I hate reducing all my "fight for trans liberation" to someone getting my pronouns right, but right before you go on stage? Jeez! Especially my performance element to it, as soon as I start a lot of these times now, I'm doing my full show and as soon as I get on stage I'm starting. If I have to start with correcting someone on my pronouns, I'm like, "what?"

But also, it's other ways of inviting me to places that like- could you imagine a person like me in a dress there being safe? If not, reconsider whether or not you want to warn me before you book. I've been performing a lot at like- I mean, I'm not doing my research, but also I take that they've read my work and heard my work, and a lot of the times they haven't, and this is a key mistake these organisers have. They have seen "black queer performance artist", booked me, and not done any research on who I am and my work, and they're just booking me because it's LGBT History Month and they want to look good.

So I think that's where it all boils down to. In fact, all those other points can go straight back to this last point of "token". I'm using the word in the sense of, "do you love and care for the person you're booking? Do you love their work? Do you appreciate them as an artist and what they're bringing to you?" If so, you'd make sure that X Y and Z didn't happen. If you don't, then you don't care, you're giving them money and you think you're doing a really great job, pat on the back, look who we've got.

SS: I think that that's the same, I also want to- I mean, I know it's not necessarily for this podcast, whatever that really means, but I've genuinely had questions, concerns, thoughts about representation, that's why we're here, but also, more specifically regarding along the binary, and the pretense of there not being a binary but then reinforcing one of 'femme' or 'masc' sort of identities is how- because that's interesting to me, and also, I have to think a bit more a through it, because in some ways, I bet it's obvious. But when I'm asked to speak places, in some ways it's- I'm actually- I'm warned. But I know that my friends who are- who are femme, or who are trans-femme, or however… like along the femme spectrum, people just assume- assume people like that, trans-femme folks, people like you, with a feminine or femme representation or self-representation, to live off your fierceness, or something? Do you know what I'm trying to say?

I've literally seen it happen… This is what's going to go on, with me in my like, daily bow-tie situation, and then high-femme, truly fierce, and they identify as fierce, and legit are fierce as fuck, but as though that gives you some sort of black magic or negrous power to lift yourselves above and not experience violence because you can stomp them with your fishnets and your combat boots, and... This is not how that works. I don't know what that means and I don't know- in some ways- first of all, I totally recognise and hear what you're saying about how that's now a part of your poetry, whether you wanted it to be or not, especially if you're about to perform, that's... it casts a pall over how are you are now going to be in this performance space.

For me, I also read it as a form of misgendering as well, that the differences that I've seen between femme and trans-femme people being prepared to enter a space, and how I'm addressed because it's almost like, "well... we get that you're a woman and so fundamentally you're going to be a bit sensitive, and so people will see you in the bow-tie and we just wanna prepare you because transgressing masculinity," even though it's better to be transgressing towards masculinity than the other way, as we know, "we just want to let you know because we're looking out for you." That's the only way that I can think to read it really in these moments: so she or they can live off of her or their fierceness. But then all I have to collapse on when I'm seen- seen by them, even if it's not the accurate way, especially not, as women, we're just weak, and therefore I need some sort of additional- what is going on here? And I think I'm giving a lot of words to this experience and trying to tease it out.

But I want to be clear: this happens in the space of 10 or 15 seconds. It's super quick but that's the scene and that's the set, that's how it's- those are the positionalities that are then made to exist. And am I going to spend my time writing myself out to them and trying to correct and find the nuance, and spend an hour and a half on this, or am I going to shove myself on stage for my five minutes? It has to be the latter, because we're also living in a capitalist sense and understanding of community. There's no time, which is what hyper-capitalism does. It robs us of the time to slow down and say... not that you're misgendering me, not something that's as reductive as that, but really, here are the conditions which you are robbing me of to thrive in my own purpose. And here's why that's not okay. See, I guess I had some things to say about it also.

DT: When we spoke last summer, Travis, it did seem also like a lot of people that were putting on spoken word- not a lot, but some, especially the ones that went wrong- said, "we've done enough to be welcoming, because we've put a plus sign on the end of LGBT." And that massing together of quite a large, disparate group of people into one symbol seemed to be causing some problems- well, a lot of problems.

TA: I call B.S. on it all. I think after these events, people are like, "oh, but it's so hard to bring together this community, it's so hard to do this and this..." Yeah! It is hard to bring together a group of people with various things- but also, not going to blow my own trumpet, because I didn't even do most of the hard work and grafting, and organising of this, right… I was organising Queer Creations. This was not a perfect line-up. No line-up is perfect. There was some white woman that spoke for 10 minutes, for too long, and we all knew that, and that was a mistake on our part. We know that there was a poem there that shouldn't have been in there.

But the night itself was not QTIPOC specific. It was open. If people wanted to turn up, no one was policing, no one was asking what sexuality at the door. I know there were straight people in there, and at the end I was like, "okay," but at the time I was- and this night was a really nice vibe. It

created a really nice energy for certain people, I hope. I don't know what some people think. But there wasn't these- big hiccups. If there were others then I hope that they could come forth to the organisers. And then it was this idea that yes, we had to put in some work to do that, but that's what responsibility you take on when you're creating a space. So all these organisers last year?

I don't really think they're doing it any more, I think it was a quick trend that was going on last year, like, "I'm a straight person! I wanna put on a queer event, because let's commodify on that!" And it's still kinda happening. They have a responsibility. You have to take on that responsibility. That you are now hosting a space and that is a responsibility, and if you don't want the responsibility, don't do it. Simple as. Because you're hosting space to people and I think they think they do enough just to invite us. But if I invited someone to my house for dinner but then gave them unseasoned chicken then I'm not really giving them a good dinner.

SS: Or asking them to cook, which is literally what happens! There's the cupboard!

TA: Yeah, that's way more accurate! Pay for your transport, come over, cook, and then pay for the food as well. So much of this is unpaid as well. I hate bringing up payments a lot of the time but... a lot of these queer POC, trans POC artists that were getting booked for these events were- I hate the word established, we're all- but in the system's idea of established, or published by the Academy, it was all already given all this credibility that if a white person had they would never be asked to do it for free. And that's what I mean- we're inviting them over but we're also not paying them. So I don't know.

SS: I think- I mean, the nights can do a lot of work, and it's sort of a secret story of what the poem I chose was about in terms of being- having care, thinking of care as a real thing. Shout-out also to the Care Collective, which is fantastic. But also, with what Travis was saying, being responsible, and that doesn't just mean coddling or patronising or having to care for and hold us, but just really think about the radical potential of what it means to hold a space and to give access, like you were just talking about, I think that's…

I'm sorry to be- I mean, it sounds a little bit... abstract. But I really, really, genuinely feel, if people were just careful and had more care in terms of what it meant to host the thing, or perform and act, I think that will cut out a lot of the problem. Because there's already systemic B.S. that we're talking about, right? But I think for any people who are listening and try to walk in the purpose of change and making things- I don't even know. I want to say equitable, not equality, but really a system in which people can thrive, everyone can thrive. Just think before you do things; I think the ability to live in ignorance is, if not the, then one of the whitest things I've ever heard.

TA: That's a really good quote.

SS: I live for bumper stickers.

DT: I'm gonna half end there, because I really like that. But I'd like to finish by talking about your writing, both of you. Maybe we'll start with Travis.

TA: Yeah. So, last week I showcased a piece of work I've been working on for a while. Wow, can't get my words out. It's called "Stories of a Queer Brown Muddy Kid", it's a live art cross-disciplinary piece that is- I promise isn't as wanky as I just made it sound. And it did really well at the RVT [Royal Victoria Theatre] and it looks like it's going to be at Hackney Attic at the end of

March. It tells the story of a 16-year-old, at that time, gay kid walking around gay bars under age. And it's a web cam conversation between that person, their mum, and God. Again: isn't as wanky as it sounds. But yeah, I'm also performing at the Genderfuck Ball next week at Goldsmiths. I bought a candyfloss dress for it. It should be fun.

SS: I really should go.

DT: Have you got a blog or anything? With dates and stuff.

TA: Yeah. Website's currently being made. But you can follow me on Twitter, where I do lots of angry things with emotions @TravisAlabanza, and also my SoundCloud I've started using as a bio for all my dates because I'm still waiting for that website to be made.

DT: So how did that latest piece develop? Was it workshopping, or...?

TA: So, "Stories of a Queer Brown Muddy Kid" is- basically, I'm kind of cheating, the name's not new. When I was in Bristol- I grew up in Bristol- when I was deciding to leave Bristol I spent a year and a half on the open mic poetry scene in Bristol and just being- really needing to improve and that was a really great time, but also I felt like I wasn't being really heard and I kept on seeing a lot of people that were progressing in this idea of bookings and people talking about them. And at the time I was really young and wanting that too. So I left- the Stokes Croft Art Festival happened every year, and I emailed them saying, "you need to give me a slot, I'm making my own show." But I didn't have a show, and I put out this thing called Stories of a Queer Brown Muddy Kid, which is basically just this really good name and then really not a show.

So then when I decided that now, three years on, and I felt like I was ready to create something, I didn't want change the name because the age I was writing it at was very relevant to what I was doing now; and what I did is, I started talking to a lot of my queer black- they don't all identify as queer, actually, that's really important- I started talking to my gay black friends from back home about what it was like for us growing up because I'm the only- I was thinking a lot about the fact that I'm the only one that now IDs as queer. I'm the only one that IDs as nonbinary. And I was thinking about- I'm also the only one that has left Bristol and left that place and gone to London and whatever this means, and King's College London, and a university aspect and all the privileges I access through that.

So we just started talking about all the times we snuck into gay bars. And I took actual conversations they've had with their parents- and religion was this common theme between all of us- and just created this three-way conversation. So it wasn't really workshops. It was more taking phrases, and turning them into pieces of work. Each piece- it's like a poetry show, but it's not really, but it kind of runs through as a theatre piece. Each section is very clearly talking about one phrase and it's kind of taking that phrase, and seeing where we go from it, and it was really healing. It was just like a complete self-indulgent, healing piece of work because I hadn't really sorted out that stuff, of being young and at that time, the type of masculine that really works for light-skinned black people that look like me. I hadn't really processed what that meant to be- be underaged in those gay bars. That's violent, so I needed to sort that shit out. So if that sounded interesting to anyone- come along.

DT: SA, what have you got going on at the moment? That you'd like to talk about.

SS: Gosh. Well, I'm watching a lot of Scandal. Travis and I, and I think a couple of other people, are going to be on a panel next Wednesday at UAL, called Beyond Gender: The Identity of Fashion. That's Wednesday the 17th, from 12 to 2. “This week on BBC Four, I…”- so there's that. I'm also on Twitter, but I'm so terrible at it. I've really tried to be better at social media, especially because I bother Travis for most of my days. It's @EssaySmythe on Twitter. Same for my WordPress, and I'm also in the process of building a website. In terms of writing, I’m trying to get on that academic grind, but then also, I am currently working on a chapbook of non-Anglophone- I don't even know what to call them- stories, memories, partly about blackness, let's just go with that.

They're about my- they started from a place of really trying to reconcile with my relationship to my father and his absence. But then also our meditations of masculinity, and also Costa Rica- Costa Rican Spanish and also Garifuna, which is a dialect, indigenous language from Central America, to really think about the language we use to afford us a space of safety, and what happens when that's not present, and how to really speak one's truth when you're speaking in a language of the coloniser. It's about that- as yet untitled.

DT: What is your editing process when you're writing poetry? Do you share your work with people, or?

SS: I drink a lot. Hide it away. I cry- that's off the record, right? Then eventually, I have a really close group of friends with whom I write, that wrest it from my hands- they force it from me, they’re like, "we need to see, you need to share this, share yourself." And then I do, then there's more crying. I think that's really the extent of the process. I really... I like to write things by hand. I always have a book with me and I really like to do that, and then I also- so much as I'm thinking- I think a lot of what I think about and write about is so bound up in nostalgia because when I want to think about big things like colonialism and oppression and masculinity and misogyny and these sorts of things, diaspora, I don't really need to go terribly far. I just need to go to my mum's house, you know? It's really, really bound and entrenched in there, how I begun to think about those things , forcefully, and then had to reconcile them. So sometimes I just- it's sort of like an exercise in masochism. Also, just yesterday I came back from a few weeks- I want to call it a holiday, but that would be super generous.

TA: Oh my god. I follow you on Twitter, I only caught up with it yesterday.

SS: Definitely, definitely!... It was amazing because I felt- that's a whole other thing. But definitely when- I speak about the creative process, I definitely went into that with the idea, like, "I'm gonna write!" This material that, in a sense, protected me- my creative process actually went back and protected me as opposed to eventually exposing me, because I was able to see it through the lens of a creator, and someone who was going to let themselves be radically open to whatever experiences, and sometimes violences, that would occur in that space, travelling with my mum through various countries with external "otherness" but also that "foreignness" of just being two people and being adults together which has never really happened. I think I wanna say say I'm in the process of writing that but I think I've been decades in the process of writing something like this; because also that's real.

Sorry to ramble and make this another aside but I think what we were speaking about a little bit earlier, in terms of QTIPOC youth and how they can grow up and think about having access or having- having not just a purpose- of course they'll have a purpose- but being able to share that purpose. And I think a lot of what that's tied to, especially in terms of access, is the fact that we're

not expected to live that long, and we're not really expected to live and thrive and be contributors to our communities and tellers of our own stories- and I'm moving myself like a narcissist.

But I think, I think really what I'd like to reconcile with- what I think I'd like to write about next is some sort of reconciliation or grappling with how- what a QTIPOC adult- what does adulthood mean? And thinking about- not instead of thinking about- while in the wake of thinking through the fact that so many of our lives are cut short and people aren't even saying our names but to really think about… every day I live beyond the medium of the age of- where trans people of colour don't have a life expectancy: which is 27 in the U.S., I actually don't know what it is in the UK.

TA: I don't think they actually have that data.

SS: Ah- but I didn't wanna- you know. But every every hour I live beyond that, that number, I think- well what am I- I feel like- not that it's on borrowed time because that's- I'm speaking out of my arse, and I'm speaking from a space of sheer privilege but I really think a big part of it- in Hollywood, there's a trans boom, but it's super tragic stories of these white women played by cis men. And they're all incredibly tragic. But what does it really look like for there to be some tragedy but also to be able to tell a story and grapple with what does it mean to ones who've had a mother-daughter relationship and now to have this newfound adult relationship that is so dysfunctional but also speaks to the intersections of a lot of violences, and to be able to have the space to think through that beyond the age where I should not even be here. That was a long explanation, but yeah, that's what I'm trying to do.

DT: As a final point, as we're talking about younger listeners and younger writers- is there any particular advice you wish you'd been given?

TA: Just don't- I wish I could've told my younger self, don't listen to what they say is poetry. Find what you think is great. Read it, love it, and then just keep on practising. And just- I don't know, I feel like black poor writers have this extra inner voice in them, like I'm sure a lot of writers have in their head, telling them not only that what they're writing isn't good, but that they can't even write… I still sometimes question if I can write. I think I would just say find other writers that speak like you, start looking- start looking at poetry in a broader sense of words, and then start realising that the music artists you see creating shit, the people you see on your corner- when you're cussing out your brother, these are rhymes that you can then take and create into poetry. Just tell my younger self to keep on doing it!

SS: I think- so, if we're saying what we'd tell ourselves and what we'd tell QTIPOC youth, I think I would say to myself that I really like the shape of your lips. And I think that when you part them worlds come forth. And I think that you should, if no one else will, really honour that you can do that, because it's really amazing. That's what I would tell adorable little SA, with the same size glasses, oddly. Yeah, that's all, I think. Feel so important, and put yourself there. Love the shape of your lips, that's what I'd say.

DT: Very nice. Actually, one final thing before we go- is there anyone that you would recommend- writers and performers, for the listeners to check out?

SS: There's a person called Travis Alabanza.

TA: I'm also wondering, if instead of recommending them to specific people, recommending them to online spaces that will provide them with even more. I personally loved the- I don't know how to pronounce- the [INAUDIBLE] Journal? That was a really good resource for me to find other young creatives, doing stuff. I think Galdem coming out at the moment there's a lot of people, they're doing a lot of lists of young creatives and these are people that, when you say their name someone will go, "I haven't heard of them." They won't be like, "ah, I've heard of them," and I think that's so important. Because they're usually saying something that's so important.

Also check out... Oh, Dutty Girl Bristol DJs? They're an art space and they make their own fashion and stuff, but they're also doing DJ stuff which is really cool for me to look at when they DJ, how poetic what they're speaking over is. Basically redefining this narrow box of poetry, for me. I wouldn't have gotten into poetry without music, so start listening to music, start listening to grime artists. I love grime so that's always gonna be my recommendation.

SS: I wanna second, which I've been doing all day, everything Travis has said. I think the [INAUDIBLE] Journal's really, really fantastic, and I've kinda been moved by- like, we were slagging off on anthologies a bit earlier and I think that volume- it's not an anthology but that's a way to do it. I mean, it seems really radical and collective and really an example of how we can be a community and how our texts can co-exist without having to co-opt or speak for one another. Even the editors know. I obviously have to give a plug for Them, THEMlit.com, and also, there is- some really really dear friends have a zine, called Mixed Up!. It's a mixed queer- mixed race queer feminist zine, the second volume is just now wrapping up so I'm looking forward to seeing what happens, and fingers crossed that I'm staying in it. Yeah, I think that that and zines is in general, are a fantastic space; so there's Rudy Loewe, Jacob Joyce, and lots of other people, and I think that's something that's been going on for decades. There's an entire system of circulation, that, if we could just- and I hate to put money on it, because some of us just don't have any- but if we just give that more attention and give that more play it will continue to shake the systems and hierarchies of publishing, and giving agency to who- and who are the gatekeepers of our voices?

DT: I just wanted to reiterate that I've really enjoyed that anthology that I mentioned earlier- "Troubling the Line"- not least because each writer was allowed one or two pages of space for an artist statement, rather than the short bio that everyone gets, and it was a real insight as to why that person was writing in general, no matter what the context was, and if it's- I was gonna say, if it was in your library, it's not gonna be in your library... The Poetry Library have it, in London, in the Southbank, they have a couple of copies so it does exist in certain places. But thank you, Travis, thank you, SA. I've really enjoyed it. And as many of these links we've just been talking about, I'll be putting them in the description box of the YouTube video.

TA: Fab.

SS: That's wonderful. Glad to be here with you, Travis.

TA: Peace out!

End of transcript.