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[Episode 26: Selina Nwulu](#) (May 2015)

Host: Kyla Manenti – **KM**

Guest: [Selina Nwulu](#) – **SN**

Transcript edited by David Turner – 17/2/2017

Conversation:

KM: Hello my name is Kyle Manenti and you are listening to another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. I'm joined by Selena Nwulu.

SN: Hello.

KM: And in true Lunar tradition we're going to start with a poem.

SN: Okay. So, this is called;

Encyclopaedia

He thinks me an encyclopaedia,
scrapes his fingers through the depths of my chapters
and tries to rip my binding
so he can separate and hang up my pages,
searching for proof of my sadness.
He will not stop until every line has been conquered,
will not rest till all words have been crushed into their vowels.

He thinks me an encyclopaedia
and then wonders why I have become a closed book.

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KM: Great. Hello.

SN: Hi.

KM: My first question is; Why poetry?

SN: So I think, for me, something I've really appreciated growing up is that my sisters... I've got four older sisters and they always told me to write or told me to create something so, it might have been a short story or a poem. So, for me, I'm just really comfortable with doing that. I think, for me, the transition has been doing that more publicly but I've not been so afraid of it as other people that I've spoken who associate poetry with school or something really quite disconnected from their everyday life. I see it as really an outlet for me to express myself. So, yeah, I think that's how poetry has become really important to me.

KM: How often do you read your poetry in public?

SN: So, I guess maybe a few times a month but I'm writing a lot more so I'm performing a bit less but I hope to get back into it again towards the end of the year.

KM: Cool, and have you had anything published?

SN: So, yes. I've been published in a few magazines and publications and I have a collection coming out this summer which will be a chapbook collection which I'm looking forward to sharing with everybody, hopefully people will like it. So, yeah I've been published here and there.

KM: Who is publishing the collection?

SN: [Burning Eye](#).

KM: Very cool! Excellent. I've spotted you in Lunar Poetry Magazine actually, I've come across you. [**SN:** Yes.] You're familiar with Lunar Poetry which is very good. [**SN:** Thank you.] Welcome to Lunar!

SN: Thank you very much for having me.

KM: Are you up for reading us another poem?

SN: Yeah. So, I'll give a little intro to this. My family are from Nigeria and so I often think about who I would have been if my parents hadn't decided to come here. So, this is kind of what I'm thinking about in this poem which is called;

Two Sides of a Coin

There is a girl, who looks like me,
walking through the streets of Lagos.
She is freshly plucked mangoes and forehead beads of sweat.
She is flat shoes and a head wrap on Sundays.
She is a collision of patterns chasing each other.

She looks like me but her vowel sounds have shrunk,
there are no Yorkshire undertones here.
Instead she speaks in half songs,
rolls Igbo off her tongue like blooming hibiscus
and wears her ancestors' sayings on her chest like armour.

She weaves through this downtown scene in fluid choreography:
the joke thrown to a passing neighbour,
the pause and smell of the pile of peppers in the market.
Each act has a home in this moving composition,
you can see her belonging in the sway of her hips.

If you look closely enough,
you can see how her shoulders sigh like mine,
can hear her life in the drag of her flat feet
and feel their tendency to wander.
We both laugh with the weight and depth of a church bell.
On a good day it will throw our heads back.

Sometimes I see these two versions of myself
like two sides of a coin: heads – here, tails – over there.
I wonder why the coin landed on this side.
I wonder which version would have laughed the most.

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KM: That's great! I definitely agree with the church bell. I think I might have seen your head throw back a bit there as well!

SN: I'm glad you made that connection.

KM: Yeah, all the rest I was like, "What is all this about?" but then, yea the church bell. So, let's talk about your critiquing process. Do you have people that you share your writing with or do you look for feedback from audiences?

SN: I don't know. I think I share it with people more than look for feedback from audiences. I mean it's great to get feedback from audiences but I feel like open-mic and performing is often quick and dirty. You're on for like ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, it's not necessarily the kind of in-depth critique that they can give you and that's fair enough.

That's not necessarily what they're there for, they're there to, kind of, just appreciate you in that movement. Whereas the writing process is a bit more methodical so, that's when I would send it to a few people to look over for their honest feedback. I think there's also something about doing poetry that links in with activism and politics which I try and do sometimes. So, to get a different perspective feels a lot more important than if I was writing a poem about love or something. Which I still want feedback on but I just feel like that's more of a personal thing, whereas something with a bigger context is something that I really seek wider feedback about.

KM: How would you like to see your writing progress? I know you've got the book coming out but would you look to do shows [or the] Edinburgh [Festival]?

SN: Yeah, I think I, for the most part, want to publish books. I'd love to be surrounded by my own books if that's not a narcissistic thing to say.

KM: Well if you don't sell enough copies of the next one then you might just be!

SN: I'm fully expecting them to be propping up the table. I've prepared myself for that... I would like to keep on writing books so, I think I've realised that that's my priority. Though, there's also something about performing that I'd like to explore and I think next year I'm going to work on... A one-woman show sounds quite grand, doesn't it? [**KM:** Wow.] Yeah, something like that. I think that's something I'd quite like to explore and if I do and that goes well then maybe I'll see where that goes or if I decide I don't like it then that's fair enough. I guess it's all about trying.

KM: Next stop the moon! Okay, we are going to have our third and final poem from you if that's cool with you.

SN: Yeah. So, this is called;

Be Silent

As Egypt shook, I checked the mirror for love handles,
flicked through its featured howls in a magazine,
fists punching through pixels
framed through coffee mug smears.

Newspapers gave me pictures of Palestine
folding in on itself, fleeing from love lost.
Crumpled civilians dodged my doodles
and idle to-do lists.

As my remote switched on Syria,
I checked my stomach in the TV's reflection,
sucked in cheek bones and imagined myself downsized,
the glare of machine guns in the background.

The world spins off its axis.
I misunderstand as I over-tweeze.
I hear my heart beat louder than theirs
until I forget even having remembered.

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KM: You could say that was a bit more political, couldn't you?

SN: Yeah, I thought I'd drop that in.

KM: Dipped into the politics.

SN: Indeed.

KM: What have been your main influences as a writer and performer?

SN: When I started writing, when I was younger, it was just what was going on for me. I think that ties into the collection, actually, because it's called, *The Secrets I Let Slip* and there's something about... I write poetry almost as if it was like a diary entry so it was very very personal to me and it wasn't necessarily related to anything external.

SN: Whereas in making the transition to performing more openly and writing more openly, I feel like it's much more influenced by politics and by the news. And also, the links

between the personal and the political so, writing a poem about being unemployed for example is very personal but I'm linking that to the bigger context of youth unemployment which was very present when I was unemployed. So, it's a mixture of things really but I'd say that the biggest influence is, you know, global protest and politics and social justice as well. I'd say they were my big factors.

KM: Finally, what would you recommend to our listeners to go out and see or read or watch?

SN: I think that there's so much out there, actually, that... I don't want to be London-centric but because I'm in London, I know London a bit more and you could see something every day. It's a really exciting time so, I think the Free Word Centre is doing quite a lot of interesting stuff around climate change and poetry and that's really exciting. I'd also say that The Albany and Shoreditch Town Hall Theatre are doing some really interesting spoken word plays which I'd really recommend keeping an eye on.

I just saw a writer, poet-playwright Salena Thompson at The Albany and she did her play called, Chewing the Fat which is a personal play about overeating but was really conversational and humorous so, I definitely think she's going to do some great things. Brilliant things, beyond what she's doing already. I think there's lots of things going on, Apples and Snakes as well, they are really bringing quite a few poets so it's worth subscribing to their mailing list. I could go on but I think... Yeah just lots and lots of good things to look out for I think.

KM: Cool. Well thank you for talking to me.

SN: Thank you.

KM: I hope everyone has enjoyed listening to this. Don't forget to check in for more Lunar Poetry Shorts and I will talk to you guys sometime very soon.

End of transcript.