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[Episode 47 – Fikayo Balogun](#) (December 2015)

Transcript by Alba Frederick

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Fikayo Balogun – **FB**

Conversation:

DT: Hello my name is David Turner and this is another Lunar Poetry Short. Today I'm in a Wetherspoons pub in Liverpool street in London. It's 11 o'clock in the morning on 23rd December. The reason I'm saying that is because this is attempt 2 at an interview with Fikayo

Balogun. We recorded this yesterday in my house in Camberwell and I lost the audio file. We're just gonna try and do it again. Hello Fikayo.

FB: Hi David.

DT: Thank you for meeting me again.

FB: You owe me chocolate for this!

DT: I think so! As always, we're gonna start with a poem. And as it's 23rd December, we're gonna start with something Christmassy.

FB: Ok. This is a Christmas poem. I just wrote it so I don't really have a title for it. Maybe 'Christmas jingle'. I dunno! Maybe you tell me what you think and give it a title for me. Alright, here we go.

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

DT: Thank you so much. That was beautiful. Thank you.

FB: Thank you. I don't think I sing that well.

DT: Your singing voice is amazing! I'm glad it's you singing and not me! It wouldn't have gone as well as that!

FB: Ok, I'll take your word for it.

DT: So, the first question, as ever, is ... why poetry?

FB: Why poetry? Ok... I was a quiet, shy child. I had two brothers and I was the last one and most of the time I was by myself and I started writing 'cos it made sense for me to write down things and when I got into Secondary school ... I discovered that what I was writing was like poetry 'cos I [couldn't] write directly 'cos that would leave me open and I'm a private person.

With poetry I can weave one thing in [and] people don't know what I'm feeling but they can still relate to it because that's the way poetry works. You write something from a personal perspective and it means something to you, but when other people read it, even if they don't understand what you were feeling at the time you wrote it, it resonates on another level with them. That's why poetry is the only form of writing, in my opinion, where you write to express yourself and still write to hide your feelings.

DT: It's a funny mix, isn't it?! You're trying to be open, but also a lot of the time if it's purely confessional it's not very accessible to other people. It needs to be a bit more generalised for people to connect with it.

FB: I think sometimes when you write, it's hard for people to separate writers from their work. Everyone thinks you're writing about yourself, or your parents or you're writing about people close to you when you write and sometimes it makes you feel vulnerable 'cos you're naked. It's all you're thinking in your head that you've put down, and [with] writing prose it means you're writing down everything you're thinking. And it's too open. But with poetry, it gives you that freedom to express it. So, if you're feeling very shitty right now, if you write it and say that you're feeling really shitty, that is you coming out and telling people "This is what I'm feeling".

But when you're writing poetry you don't write you're feeling shitty, you could just write down 'My heart is blue'. 'Your heart is blue' could mean so many things. It could mean you're tired, it could mean you're finished. It could mean whatever. It's left to you to interpret it. If you feel you want to tell people the story behind it then it's up to you and if you don't feel like you want to tell them the story, then you don't have to. But when they read it they will find [it] somewhere in their mind and it will still make sense to them and you don't really have to say what you're thinking.

DT: Which writers or poets have influenced you the most?

FB: When I was growing up, I read a lot of Wole Soyinka's work, a Nigerian writer. And one poem that stayed with me, and is one poem that was at the beginning of my writing journey is ['To look at Two' by Robert Frost](#), and those are the two people I would say that started influencing my writing. I love the way I've read other writers and authors and they have in turn influenced my writing. Like when I did my Masters in Creative writing at Roehampton university.

One poet that I really worked with was [Gwendolyn Brooks](#). I loved her work and one poem that I really loved that she wrote was ['We Real Cool'](#). I love that poem to bits! So, from the beginning of my writing, I've had different writers influence the way I write. I'm always looking out for new writers. It was last year that I discovered spoken word, which is great! Someone said it seems like theatre and poetry got together, had a baby, and called it spoken word. I think it was Sarah Kay. I think that is the best way to describe it. I love acting.

My dad is a lawyer, so you've got to state your case really well. If you can state your case with all the facts and make him see your point, he will let you do anything, but you've got to just be able to give it out to him and that is really a difficult thing. So, spoken word was great! It's me writing and I could stand there and act out what I'm writing. On the spoken word scene there are a lot of great writers and spoken word artists in London and outside London. I went to Edinburgh [Fringe Festival]. There were so many people, I was blown away! [There are] a lot of new writers and old who influence my writing. I'm sure I'll discover more people.

DT: That's the thing with spoken word. That's how we met, in the spoken word scene in London and probably at the Poetry Cafe, we met. Most poets meet at the Poetry Cafe in London. Whenever you feel like you know what's going on, about 10 new people come along. And they're just brilliant, and it's really annoying!

FB: I know! You get there and you see a new person. Sometimes you get there and you see some people and you're like: "I think I can definitely do better than that". And then sometimes you see new people that you've never seen before and they be like "I'm a spoken word virgin", but when they come on stage, you're like "Oh my god, why did you not think about that." There are a lot of people that are writing and hiding it under their bed and I think a lot of people should find the boldness to come out and show their writing 'cos I think everyone's got a lot to say.

DT: Speaking of spoken word, we'll have another reading.

FB: Ok. This poem is titled: 'Tonight'

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

FB: Thank you.

DT: Thank you very much. So we spoke a bit yesterday about the fact that growing up in Nigeria, you spoke Yoruba at home, but your education was in English at school. Could you explain a bit about how your literature education was and how it was divided between African writers and I suppose European and American English language writers?

FB: I think we did mainly European writers actually, because Nigeria was colonised by Britain. **[Laughter]** So the country's got like 250 ethnic groups and we all speak different languages, eat different food, wear different clothes. The official language is English, so most of the schools, except the ones in the villages, most of the schools speak English, they teach in English. My parents spoke Yoruba to us, 'cos if they didn't we probably wouldn't speak our language. We spoke English in school, and we are not allowed to speak Yoruba. You are not allowed to speak your native language in school. In some schools you've got to pay one Naira if you speak your native language in school, so you're not allowed to - even though we still do! The educational system in Secondary school is 6 years.

We've got 3 years junior classes and 3 years senior classes - and that's when you do the literature. So you've got your syllabus for the 3 years and you do your final exam in the third year. Throughout [the] 3 years, we have the African prose and the non-African prose. The African prose are by African writers, not necessarily Nigerian, but African - so Ghana, Nigeria, or any other African country. The non-African is obviously from the West, and we've got the prose, we've got the drama, and every syllabus has a Shakespeare, so it was Merchant of Venice, or Othello, or any other Shakespeare drama and then you've got poetry. So we may have 4 poems by African writers and 4 non-African writer poems that are studied for the 3 years and in the final year you do the questions from the poems and texts that you've studied and you've got to answer. It's a mixture of both really, you've got African and non-African.

DT: Are there any African writers in particular that you would recommend to people listening to check out? 'Cos I'm sure there'll be plenty of people interested in trying to hunt some new writers down.

FB: Ok...yeah there's a lot of them really. One person that everyone probably knows is [\[Ola Rotimi\]](#). His writing is great. One of his dramas 'Gods are not to blame' I think has been done to death! Everyone does it! His writing is good. He's a political person so most of his writings are a little bit political. And there's Ne'e Okon Darey, Femi Osofisan. Ben Okri is also a great writer and there's a Nigerian writer that when I was in Secondary school I never knew he was Nigerian. I used to think he was not a Nigerian because his name is [J P Clark](#). You never would think that was a Nigerian [name], but I think I studied some of his poems at school and he's also a good writer and one of the modern writers now is [Chimamanda \[Ngozi Adichie\]](#), her writings have been made into films like 'Half of the Yellow Sun". So, yeah. Those are writers that I think everyone should check out.

DT: Thank you very much

FB: I'm also a writer. You should check out my writing!

DT: Yeah, definitely check out Fikayo. Actually, we'll mention your blogs and stuff, but we'll have one final reading first and then we'll tell people where they can check out your work.

FB: This poem is titled 'Lust' and it's to everyone, every country that has been taken without consent.

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

FB: Thank you for listening to me. I'm honoured.

DT: Thank you very much Fikayo. And anyone who wants to check out your work they can get you at www.fikayabalogun.wordpress.com and the links will be underneath the video.

FB: Yep, thank you.

DT: And all the names that you recommended - we're gonna put links to all the other writers and stuff. Thanks very much.

FB: Thank you very much David.

DT: Cheers. Buh-bye.

FB: Save this!

End of transcript.