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## [Episode 24 - Hannah Gordon](#) (April 2015)

Transcript by Christabel Smith

Host: Lizzy Palmer – **LP**

Guest: Hannah Gordon – **HG**

### Conversation:

**LP:** Hello, my name is Lizzy Palmer and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Today, I am joined by the lovely poet Hannah Gordon in a secret location, which I cannot

disclose. If it's all right with you, Hannah, by way of introduction, we'll start with your first poem.

**HG:** OK. This is the first spoken word poem I ever wrote, it's called So Drunk.

**[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]**

**LP:** Wonderful, thanks very much. So my first question is: why poetry?

**HG:** I guess for me, poetry is something I really got into, definitely the performance of it, because I can't sing, is a way to share my words. I've been writing poetry since I was a really young child. I've got evidence of eight-year-old poems, which are terrible, but I guess I got into poetry kind of through prayer.

I know that sounds like an odd thing to say, but I guess that's where I really started to enjoy words as a form of expression. I got quite obsessed with grief poetry when I was younger. My mum used to... It's a tradition in Ireland, when someone dies, you get a little card with a picture on it and there's often a poem at the back. They were the first poems I really engaged with.

I think poetry is also like a form of therapy for me. For me as a child, it was a way of expressing and confessing things, sometimes to God, but as a depressed teenager, I read something by Sylvia Plath and she said 'the slime of all my yesterdays rots in the hollow of my skull' and that really resonated with me. I feel like poetry is a way to decolonise the worst of me from my thoughts in some ways, that's why it's therapeutic for me.

**LP:** That's a really interesting way in. I don't think we've had anybody say that before. It's certainly quite a common view for a lot of us that poetry is a therapeutic thing. Knowing your poems and what you write and talk about, it's all very deeply rooted in your feelings and emotions, it seems. It makes sense that you feel that way about it. So speaking of reading poetry, how often do you read in public?

**HG:** I try to perform once a week and have been for almost a year and a half now. Everyone says this, but there are so many things going on in London, I often find myself conflicted between three and four different nights on a Wednesday. I always go to Spoken Word London because that's my favourite one. It's the one I really started doing it at and I just appreciate the atmosphere there.

It's generally different people every week. There are obviously some regulars, like me, but you get an influx of lots of different ideas and different styles and I really enjoy that about it. I do go to Forget What You Heard semi-regularly. That one, it's got very high-quality, high-calibre performance and writing, but I think it can be a bit intimidating if you're just starting out, to go to that one first.

**LP:** Spoken Word London is a really good night. From what I've seen, going to lots of other nights, it does seem to be the place you get more of a warm response and atmosphere when

you read. It feels quite unusual when you go there and read for the first time. You get quite a massive response sometimes.

**HG:** That's what I love about it. I often go to Spoken Word London and I don't read, I just watch and my favourite thing is watching people who have probably never done it before, they've never been heard, so as they're reading it, the performance gets drawn out of them and you can just see them having a really amazing experience, being listened to like that.

**LP:** Magical. Have you had anything published?

**HG:** Not really. When I was about 16, I got published in one of those internet scam anthology things. It was like we really like your poem, do you want to be in our book, it's like a 12-volume, 1000-page thing. I never bought it, but I did get a letter, which had my poem printed on the front of it, and it was a demand for me to buy the book, which caused a lot of problems because my poem was an atheist confession to God about how I don't believe in him and my very strict Catholic mother saw it on the letter and it outed me as an atheist.

It wasn't great. I would like to be published, but at the same time, maybe because of that experience, I don't want to lose ownership of my work. I don't know if my stuff reads as well as I perform it. I'm not saying I'm amazing. I like to own it. I like to accentuate different parts of it.

**LP:** On that note, we'll have another poem please.

**HG:** OK, this one comes with a bit of an introduction. When my ex-fiancé dumped me suddenly, he tried to wuss out of having a real conversation with me. He was actually in a relationship with another person, I didn't know that for ages. I pressed him to give me a reason why he was breaking up with me and he eventually, quite callously, said there were three things about me he didn't like. I was unhealthy, judgemental and too emotional. So I wrote this in response to that.

**[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]**

**LP:** Thank you. You choked me up. Speaking of being too emotional...

**HG:** I choke myself up every time I do that.

**LP:** So you were talking about having ownership and control over your work. How do you critique it? Do you ever look for feedback from audiences or do you have certain people you share it with?

**HG:** I've never really critiqued my work. Editing, yes definitely. I often go back to an idea and see if I can articulate it clearer. In terms of critique, I don't have critical trains of thought or even a technical toolkit. Actually, since listening to Lunar Podcasts, I've been thinking about my work much more critically.

I've got a friend, Dean, I've written with him before, so I send him things. He will give me feedback, be very honest, sometimes brutal, but he will always actually give me an idea as well, maybe like I don't like that line, what about this line? There are a few poems that he has actually given me a line for, which is really good.

I really want to critique my work more, but I don't know how, I guess. When I first started writing poetry, always when I've written poetry, it's like I have an emotional reaction to something and then I write a poem, but now, as my writing has developed, I have an emotional reaction to something and an idea for a poem, then I have a reaction to that idea and then I get the poem. It's like an extra stage, I think, I hope it's going better.

**LP:** How would you like to see your writing progress?

**HG:** I definitely want to become more of a pro and less of an amateur. When I listen to other people talk about how they write and the thought they put into it, for me, it is quite reactionary, like a hiccup, I need to get something out. I want to write more for purpose. I'm really interested in writing more for children because I am a primary school teacher and I want to get out of the classroom and into the school hall, delivering workshops. I want to have a body of work that's suitable for children.

**LP:** Could we have a third and final poem?

**HG:** Yes, this is quite a different one. It's very short. I've never shared it before so it might be terrible. This is what I consider a page poem. It's called Uncle Monkey.

**[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]**

**LP:** Thank you. What have been the main influences over your development as a writer and performer?

**HG:** Definitely in terms of writing, I grew up learning Yeats as a family favourite because he talks a lot about the famine in Ireland. I obviously like Plath. Then I got really into hip hop. I would count Eminem, Speech DeBelle, some Australian artists, The Hilltop Hoods and Delta, they're all really great wordsmiths who inspire me.

In the poetry performances I've been doing, loads of people at Spoken Word London for a variety of things I've seen, like Pat Cash, Andrea Spisto, Sara Without An H, Pierre Sartiste, Ernesto (Sarazale), just because they all do very different things. Maybe it doesn't show in my work that they have inspired me, but they have definitely inspired me to do my own thing, in a way. Also, through Spoken Word London, I met my friend Virgil, Big Virg. He lives in Barbados, but he is an amazing poet and he's very honest, very eloquent and very hard-hitting. He's not afraid to offend people in his work and that really inspires me, I really enjoy that.

**LP:** Anything you can recommend our listeners to go and see? Anything you've read or watched? It doesn't have to be poetry-related.

**HG:** Spoken Word London, I would recommend. I recommend Silence Found A Tongue, listening to all these Lunar Podcasts because they are really, really interesting. My favourite is the Liv Wynter one. My friend Virgil, [bigvirg.com](http://bigvirg.com), and my friend Dean, as well. He's just joined this poetry collective called Tight Face, with Jake Wildhall, Becky Moses and a few other people, so it will be interesting to see what they do. That's my recommendations.

**LP:** Thank you very much, Hannah, it was lovely having you and thanks everybody for listening.

**End of transcript.**