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[Episode 101: Kim Moore; Zeina Hashem Beck](#) - (19/06/2017)

Transcription by Christabel Smith

Producer: David Turner – **DT**

**Intro:**

**DT:** Hello, this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. How are you lot? I don't normally talk about my private life in the podcasts and certainly not in these pre-written intros. This piece of news straddles the private and professional. My co-editor and some-time host Lizzy and I have gotten married. Which is great. For us. I suppose. This means next time she pops up on the podcast, she'll be Lizzy Turner, which is all a bit weird, but then life is weird.

Hope you all enjoyed our recent 100<sup>th</sup> episode. I didn't appear on that one, so didn't get a chance to say thank you to everyone who's listened and contributed to the series. We wouldn't have reached 100 episodes without that support. A big thank you also to Arts Council England, who have enabled me to make the series into a better-quality and more representative project. As always, you can follow us at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook and Instagram, @Silent\_Tongue on Twitter and you can subscribe to the series on Soundcloud, iTunes and Stitcher or wherever else you download your podcast.

There is a transcript of this conversation available to download at [www.lunarpodcasts.com](http://www.lunarpodcasts.com), along with the other 45 or so we've got finished so far, with the aid of Arts Council funding. Coming up in the second half of this episode, we have Zeina Hashem Beck, but first, it's Kim Moore. Kim is a poet, educator and co-founder of the Kendal Poetry Festival. I met Kim at the Verve Poetry Festival in Birmingham, back in February of this year. We got together quickly on the final day of the festival for a chat about her collection, *The Art of Falling*, scaffolding and her phd. Here's Kim. Enjoy.

### **Part One:**

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Kim Moore – **KM**

**KM:**            My People

I come from people who swear without realising they're swearing.  
I come from scaffolders and plasterers and shoemakers and carers,  
the type of carers paid pence per minute to visit an old lady's house.  
Some of my people have been inside a prison. Sometimes I tilt  
towards them and see myself reflected back. If they were from Yorkshire,  
which they're not, but if they were, they would have been  
the ones on the pickets shouting *scab* and throwing bricks at policemen.  
I come from a line of women who get married twice. I come from  
a line of women who bring up children and men who go to work.  
If I knew who my people were, in the time before women  
were allowed to work, they were probably the women who were  
working anyway. If I knew who my people were women  
got the vote, they would not have cared about the vote. There are  
many arguments among my people. Nobody likes everybody.  
In the time of slavery my people would have had them if they  
were the type of people who could afford the, which they  
probably weren't. In the time of casual racism, some of my people  
would and will join in. Some of my people know everybody  
who lives on their street. They are the type of people who will argue  
with the teacher if their child has detention. The women  
of my people are wolves and we talk to the moon in our sleep.

©Kim Moore, *The Art of Falling*, Seren, 2015

**DT:** Thank you very much, Kim, thanks for joining us. Do you ever read that poem in front of your people?

**KM:** Yeah, I have done. I sent it to my mum when it was a lot rawer and a bit more brutal, I think, and she was quite upset by some of the lines, so I edited those bits out. I would never have published it if she hadn't kind of agreed to it.

**DT:** So it was a lot more brutal before you edited it?

**KM:** It was more direct, I think, and it wasn't as good. It was a weaker poem as well, because it was a first draft, so I think it was good, actually, that she said 'Oh, I'm not sure about that line'. I think it's stronger now.

**DT:** Yeah. Where are your people from?

**KM:** All my family live in Leicester, from two estates in Leicester. So my dad's family are from the Saffron Lane estate and my mum's are from Braunstone.

**DT:** As a bit of context for the people that are listening, it's February 19<sup>th</sup> and we're in Birmingham and you've been performing and appearing at Verve Poetry Festival. A lot of what you read seemed to be informed by identity and family and history. Does that inform all of your writing?

**KM:** I don't know. I always start with the My People one, cos it's kind of an introduction in itself. I suppose there's a lot of poems in the book about my dad, probably more than my wider family. My dad's a scaffolder and I'm obsessed, or fascinated, by the world of scaffolding, because it's a very masculine area still. It's one of the few places, or jobs, where there aren't many women working in it. I've been to work with my dad and just sat and observed it and I like talking to him about it, but just being a woman on a scaffolding site changes the atmosphere, changes the way the men talk and react.

I did say to my dad once 'Are there any women scaffolders?' and he said 'Oh yeah, yeah, there are. There's one in Birmingham.' So yeah, there is one, apparently.

**DT:** I served a joinery apprenticeship and there's a big step from that to poetry, but there's an even bigger step from joinery to scaffolding, because even on the building site, you still didn't really mix with the scaffolders much. They are a bit of a breed alone, aren't they? It's one of the few jobs you can still get without being asked too many questions.

**KM:** Yeah, I think it's probably one of the most physically demanding jobs. I'm interested in that as well. I've been writing some new poems about my dad being a scaffolder and asking him questions. He left school when he was 16 and started scaffolding. He literally just walked into the yard and said 'Can I have a job?' and then became a labourer. His first job was going up the Leicester power station, up the funnel, and in those days, you didn't have to pass any qualifications, you just followed the scaffolder up.

He was telling me about that and says that scaffolders try and break someone new, they call it breaking them, so you work them and work them until they cry, or fall over. I was really appalled by this and I said 'You haven't done that to anybody, have you, Dad?' and he was like 'Yeah, course I have.' I said 'Did they do that to you as well?' He went 'Nobody's ever broke me.' I think I have that in me, with running and pushing yourself to physical limits.

**DT:** Do you find that as you've dedicated more of your life to writing, there's an even greater need to find a physical outlet?

**KM:** I don't know, I just like being outside. Running's become my social life now as well.

**DT:** We've got quite similar backgrounds. My dad left school at 14 and became a plumber, he's now a caretaker in a school. The generation I'm part of, you can never be as working class as your parents, because you had to finish school. Having had a physical job, I find it hard to dedicate too much time just to writing, because I feel like I'm not working, do you have that?

**KM:** Yeah, definitely, I feel constantly guilty when I'm sat around, reading. I'm doing a PhD now and I'm finding it really hard, well, not really hard because I'm obviously doing it, but a lot of the time, I sit around all day in my dressing gown and don't get dressed all day and feel like a bit of a slob, and read a book and think 'What have I done with my day? I've only read a book.'

**DT:** Can you complete a PhD just by watching Bargain Hunt?

**KM:** We'll find out in three years' time.

**DT:** There were so many elements I recognised in your reading, feeling almost constantly fraudulent. I can't believe my career now is making a literature podcast. I've done a lot of jobs, I'm good at getting sacked or jacking jobs in, but I've stuck with this one. I feel hugely lucky, but it's bizarre. Do you ever feel you have to excuse it?

**KM:** Yeah, I can identify with that feeling bizarre, but I think I've always had that. Me and my twin sister were the first people in our family to go to university and then I went to a music college. My brother-in-law still calls me 'student' instead of Kim and 'tax dodger', in a very friendly way. I wouldn't want to give the impression, I hope that poem shows a love for my family, as well as a critical eye. That feeling of being a fraud, I can't believe I'm being paid to sit around.

**DT:** Do you feel like there's a pressure on your writing to reaffirm where you've come from?

**KM:** No, I just write about what I like, what I know.

**DT:** That's definitely an assumption I was making, just on the small sample of your work I've seen.

**KM:** I want to write the type of poems that my family could read and understand. My mum and dad aren't into poetry, but I want to write poems they could read and connect with. Apart from when I'm moaning about them.

**DT:** Next, it would be good to talk about your music education, but we'll take another reading first. Could we please have your most 'trumpety' poem?

**KM:** For the last 13 years, I've worked as a peripatetic brass teacher, which involved going around to about 25 schools a week and teaching whole classes of eight-year-olds, so 30 eight-year-olds, get a trumpet, a cornet or a baritone, and then the teacher gets a trumpet, a cornet or a baritone, and then we all make beautiful music together. This poem's a list of all the terrible things that have happened to me as a trumpet teacher, so it's all true, but I've changed the gender of the children to protect their identities, because that's the responsible teacher that I am;

### The Trumpet Teacher's Curse

A curse on the children who tap the mouthpiece  
with the heel of their hand to make a popping sound,  
who drop the trumpet on the floor then laugh,  
a darker curse on those who fall with a trumpet  
in their hands and selfishly save themselves,  
a curse on the boy who dropped a pencil  
on the bell of his trombone to see if it did  
what I said it would, a curse on the girl  
who stuffed a pompom down her cornet  
and then said it was her invisible friend that did it,  
a curse on the class teacher who sits at the back  
of the room and does her paperwork,  
a curse on the teacher who says *I'm rubbish at music*  
in a loud enough voice for the whole class to hear,  
a curse on the father who coated his daughter's trumpet valves  
with Vaseline because he thought it was the thing to do,  
a curse on the boy who threw up in his baritone  
as if it was his own personal bucket.  
Let them be plagued with the urge to practise  
every day without improvement, let them play  
in concerts each weekend which involve marching  
and outdoors and coldness, let their family be forced  
to give up their Saturdays listening to bad music  
in village halls or spend their Sundays at the bandstand,  
them, one dog and the drunk who slept there the night before  
taking up the one and only bench, Gods, let it rain.

©Kim Moore, *The Art of Falling*, Seren, 2015

**DT:** Thank you very much. My friends' nine-year-old daughter has just started to learn the trombone. Hilarious. Hello Astrid, if you're listening.

**KM:** It could be worse. I was going to say, it could be worse, it could be the violin, but I shouldn't say that as a musician.

**DT:** So you worked for 13 years as a music teacher. What does peripatetic mean?

**KM:** Like travelling around different schools.

**DT:** Is that all that means?

**KM:** Yeah.

**DT:** Giving yourself some side there. Travelling music teacher is what you are.

**KM:** Well, I hate saying brass teacher as well, because people always mishear me and think I'm saying breast teacher, so that can go horribly wrong.

**DT:** Does that teaching period inform the way you write? You run workshops as well. Is it easier to teach rowdy eight-year-olds than creative writers?

**KM:** No, I would say eight-year-olds have got it over... Teaching in schools is probably one of the hardest things out of everything I've done. I actually said this to one of my classes, which is really awful, but I'd just been into a prison, a men's prison, and I was like 'You lot are worse behaved than the prisoners I've been working with'. I didn't start writing about it until I went part-time and got a bit of distance from it. It's impossible to write about it when you're in it full-time.

The connection with teaching and poetry, as a teacher you get these phrases you come out with all the time, like catchphrases, and sometimes they are like lines of poetry and you use language to hopefully make children laugh. Maybe sometimes I'm too sarcastic for them to get it, but yeah, using this repetition of phrases, and I realised when I became a trumpet teacher, I was repeating phrases that my trumpet teacher had said to me when I was younger, they just rolled off. Things my band conductor did and said, I repeated with my band. I didn't know I'd internalised them. So you have all this stuff to draw on, which I think is like a poem, like memorising.

**DT:** I still have phrases from my apprenticeship that run through my head. If I pick up certain tools. I remember the way it was explained to me. Received wisdom, things that are passed down without question, and you pick them up, rightly or wrongly. Did you move away from music teaching to focus on writing?

**KM:** I started working as a poet, running workshops basically, and then started getting invitations to readings for the last two years of being full-time, then I got invited to read at a festival, maybe it was a poet in residency or something, and I had to turn it down because I was working. Work were pretty good with letting me off every now and then to go and do

poetry, but there's only so many times I could get away with it. I was really gutted I had to miss out on going to this festival, I really wanted to go to.

I'd been moaning and moaning about missing out on opportunities and then it was a kind of snap decision. I was at a training day for work the first day in September, talking to my line manager about it, he was a friend as well, and I said 'How would it be next year, if I went part-time, is it possible to reduce my hours?' She said 'We could do it this year, if you wanted.'

**DT:** They were keen to get rid of you.

**KM:** Yeah, they were keen to get rid of me. The contract I was on, I was a full-time teacher, so if they didn't have any work for me, I still got paid exactly the same. I was on a really good deal. That was the 1<sup>st</sup> September, by the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, I was down to four days a week. It doesn't sound like that big a deal, but as a teacher, it's a big deal, because your job security's gone. Once I'm part-time, they can reduce my hours by a certain percentage. You've got less pension and blah, blah, blah, so for me, it was a massive thing, but then I decided it in an afternoon and then went back home to my husband and said 'I'm part-time.'

There was some funding for a PhD and I thought 'I'll just go for it, for the experience of an interview'. I ended up getting it and had to hand my notice in. So again, it wasn't really thought out or planned, I just ended up.

**DT:** Where are you doing your PhD?

**KM:** Manchester Metropolitan. I'm basically looking at how we write about every-day sexism, so I want to look at small, annoying acts of sexism and micro-aggression and how you write poetry about that. What happens if you put something small that you usually ignore into a poem and create space around it? It's been interesting. I've started writing the poems already and I get quite interesting reactions to them.

**DT:** How's it been working so far?

**KM:** So far, I've just been looking back at my own experiences. For me, a lot of it I didn't notice happening at the time. I've only become more aware of it as I've been writing, so my dad being a scaffolder, this very masculine environment, then I grew up in a brass-band movement, which is very male-dominated, then I went to music college, and there's a lot more male brass-band players. I think I was the only female brass-band player in my year, but there was another one the year above.

So looking at those experiences, I felt there were only two ways of getting along at music college as a woman, playing a trumpet, to either go out drinking and become one of the lads, or to go out with one of the blokes. They were your two options. But a lot of the every-day sexism I'm talking about, maybe the guys who were doing it wouldn't really realise either, it's unconscious.

**DT:** We touched on that a little bit yesterday, with people that organise events and the lack of representation on panels and those reading. A lot of it is lack of awareness around the issue, not some evil conspiracy.

**KM:** As an example, I was at work and I'd had a disagreement with a female teacher and I was quite worked up about it. I was telling a male teacher about this and he said 'I bet she's got a big pubic mound, I bet she's covered in spiders' legs.' I was really shocked, but instead of challenging it, saying 'That's really inappropriate' or whatever, I just scuttled off to the staff room, going 'I'm going to make a cup of tea'. Then he followed me into the staff room and we were talking about what had happened again and he said 'If she does it again, you should flash her your tits'.

Again, I didn't say anything. I went 'do you have milk in your tea?' I just changed the subject and went home and got really angry about it, afterwards. That's a really familiar feeling for me. Things like that have happened where I've not said something at the time and then I feel angry with myself for not saying it. So for me, that's where the poetry is, that this guy, who I actually really like, I think he's a really nice bloke, he's a friend, but he's also saying these really inappropriate things.

That contrast between the two is interesting, but also looking at my own reaction to it and interrogating my own collusion with that, because how is he ever going to, if I don't say 'that was really inappropriate, why did you say that?' then he'll just carry on and say it again.

**DT:** There was a very interesting episode of *This American Life*, a reporter in Sydney challenging men on the main club strip. One guy claimed he'd slap women on the arse and she asked why he thought that was OK. He said 'they don't say anything, they just laugh.' She asked if he'd ever considered they might be scared, or they don't know how to react in a situation. The person's silence in that moment is not them giving you the OK. They spoke to three guys and none of them get it, because they haven't been told outright that silence isn't a green light.

**KM:** Yeah, silence is a coping mechanism. Laughter is a coping mechanism. Making a joke out of it, minimising it. I'm interested in it. You have to pick your battles as well.

**DT:** Going back to your first poem, the line about casual racism, I could definitely pick out people in the wider family who would behave inappropriately at times. It's knowing when to pick up on it. There aren't many people who'd challenge a group of five or six drunken men.

**KM:** I think that idea of contrast in the *My People* poem, not just the racism, but the line about the women in the family before they got the vote, would not have cared about the vote. This idea of working women, the vote was this thing that didn't affect their lives, but the women in my family are very strong and very opinionated, but they wouldn't call themselves feminists. I like things that slip between the cracks. They might say casually racist things, but they can be nice people as well, and how do you reconcile that? Nothing's simple.

**DT:** I hate these moments, because it seems like you're trivialising a serious subject, but time's running on, so we'll finish with another poem, if that's okay?



**KM:** OK, I'm going to read the title poem of my latest collection, *The Art Of Falling*, which was published by Seren in 2015.

The Art of Falling

This is for falling which is so close to failing  
or to falter or fill; as in *I faltered when I heard  
you were here*; as in *I've had my fill of falling*:  
a fall from grace, a fall from God,  
to fall in love or to fall through the gap,  
snow fall, rain fall, falling stars,  
the house falls into disrepair,  
to fall in with the wrong crowd,  
to fall out of love, to fall like Jessica  
who fell down a well and watched  
the bright disc of the sun and moon  
slowly passing, for twins who start  
so close together they must fall  
apart for the rest of their lives  
or be dammed, to fall down a hill  
like a brother, to follow like a sister,  
to be a field and fall fallow, to fall pregnant,  
for vertigo, the cousin of falling,  
for towers and stairs and pavements  
which are the agents of falling,  
for the white clifftop of a bed,  
for climbers and roofers and gymnasts,  
for the correct way to fall,  
loose-limbed and floppy,  
to fall apart after death,  
for ropes and fences and locks  
which carry the act of falling inside,  
for fall which over the ocean  
means Autumn, which means leaves  
like coins of different colours  
dropped from the pockets of trees,  
which means darker evenings,  
which means walks with the dogs,  
which means walking alone  
and not falling apart at the sound  
of your name, which God  
help me, sounds like falling.

©Kim Moore, *The Art of Falling*, Seren, 2015

**DT:** Thanks very much for the chat.

**KM:** Is that it? Goodbye. Piss off.

**Part Two (25:20):**

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Zeina Hashem Beck – **ZH**

**DT:** Next up is poet Zeina Hashem Beck. I met up with Zeina in a pretty noisy Royal Festival Hall when she was over in London recently. We chatted about her recently-released collection, *Louder Than Hearts*, and Punch the poetry night she established in Dubai. Before that, remember projects like this podcast series exist on the back of word-of-mouth recommendations, so if you like what we do, please tell friends and colleagues. We also have an audience-feedback form on our website. If you'd like to fill out one of those for us, then go over to [www.lunarpodcasts.com](http://www.lunarpodcasts.com) and click on the audience-feedback tab. Here's Zeina.

**ZH:** I'm Zeina Hashem Beck and I'm a Lebanese poet, now based in Dubai. I'm the author of two collections and two chap books, most recently my book *Louder Than Hearts* was released in April 2017. I'll begin with a poem from this one. It makes sense to begin with the very first poem in this book, because I feel it does introduce the themes quite well. A small clarification about who Sheikh Imam is. There's a reference here to someone called Sheikh Imam.

Sheikh Imam was an Egyptian singer and composer, who used to sing the colloquial Egyptian poetry of Ahmed Fouad Negm, so it's this political satire, really lovely stuff. So the reference to Sheikh Imam here is that. This is;

**BROKEN GHAZAL: SPEAK ARABIC**

I write in English the way I roam foreign cities – full of street light  
& betrayal, until I find a coffee shop that speaks Arabic.

If we were born in the cities we long for, Love – Paris, Prague, New York –  
what languages would they have taught us to speak? Arabic

says the best singers are the peddlers. & the Qur'an,  
would it still lift us if it didn't speak Arabic?

Sure, there is always Lennon, but I wonder if we would have found  
Sheikh Imam, who reminds us the wound is awake & love speaks Arabic,

who reminds us no one can colonize a river, & the tyrant  
is always afraid of the poet, especially if she speaks Arabic.

They say people who grow up in two languages have stronger memories, & they can hear the birds on the balconies speak Arabic,

& they know a mountain of orange life jackets looks like spring, though it won't revive the dead, who speak Arabic

but no longer need a visa, or translation. & you, Zeina, what else can you do but whisper to these broken lines, *Speak. Speak Arabic.*

©Zeina Hashem Beck, *Louder Than Hearts*, Bauhan Publishing, 2017

**DT:** Thank you Zeina. I was hoping you were going to read that poem. I had a quick look through the collection yesterday and today. I don't know your work that well as we only met a couple of days ago but I was interested to hear how it would sound in your own voice.

**ZH:** Why were you hoping for that particular poem?

**DT:** I really like the imagery and touching on the ideas around Arabic and English and the use of both languages. I thought it was really beautiful as well. So we met through our friend Raymond Antrobus, who threw us together in a pub and said 'You have to chat'. Sometimes, that's all that's required to meet up for a podcast chat.

**ZH:** That was really a lovely coincidence. I was just wondering what was Raymond doing exactly, in saying hi to you.

**DT:** It was definitely one of those moments where he knew exactly what he wanted to tell us, but didn't get round to.

**ZH:** That was a nice moment, though. It stuck in my head somehow.

**DT:** So you're in London, visiting from Dubai.

**ZH:** It's hot in London. I was warned that I should have a coat and a scarf, which I did bring, and I'm sitting here sweating and I come from Dubai, which is rather ironic.

**DT:** Muggy. People are going to be sticky by this afternoon. So what's the main reason for your visit?

**ZH:** The main reason is the talk I'm doing this evening with the Asia House Literature Festival. It's a talk that's called Sin Cities - Beirut After Dusk. There's going to be me, Saleem Haddad, the author of *Guapa*, Nasri Atallah and the moderator will be Zahra Hankir and we're all either Lebanese or have some Lebanese roots and we'll be speaking about the city of Beirut and how it inspires our work. So that's the main reason why I'm here. Yes, I've also done a reading a few days ago with my fellow 2016 Laureates' choices with Smith/Doorstop. That was fun, that was lots of fun.

**DT:** How important is Beirut to your writing?

**ZH:** It is influential, I will always carry Beirut somehow in my writing, but it was definitely more influential in my first book, which was out in 2014. That first collection was called *To Live In Autumn* and in my head, autumn was Beirut. The entire collection obsesses with the city, but I think I am no longer there, as in I've moved beyond that intense obsession just with Beirut. *To Live In Autumn* was dedicated for my Beirut, who inspires. This one is dedicated to our broken languages and our broken cities, plural, so I don't necessarily just have Beirut in mind anymore, but rather the Arab city and the idea of Arab cities and displacement and languages. Beirut will always be there, it's just no longer the centre in my writing.

**DT:** How would you sum up the analogy between Beirut and autumn?

**ZH:** That was in my head, back in 2006, no, I actually came up with it rather late in the writing process, but for me, back then, autumn was a season that's in between seasons. It was an inbetween-ness. It's not really hot, it's not really cold, it's not summer or winter. It's like an inbetween-ness in my head, autumn, and I feel Beirut exists in that liminal space, that it exists between different languages, it exists between war and peace, always juggling what might be contradictions but aren't, as we navigate Beirut.

**DT:** Having seen the collection you're reading from today, the disjointed nature of a lot of the forms, I'm struggling because I think it's wrong to use the word 'disjointed', just because there are breaks. There's a change, a shift, a flow between images and ideas. There are beautiful images but it's rooted in gritty, urban environments. You talk a lot about the street, there's a beautiful line about 'gifting a street that's in flight'.

**ZH:** That's in the poem *Relentless*, I think. Hold on, I'm finding the exact image, otherwise I would be paraphrasing my poetry and that comes out horrible. So 'I drew him a tree without roots, a street with enormous wings and said 'here is a tree that cannot be uprooted, a street that will take flight before it explodes'.

**DT:** Yeah, so very heavy images but everything's in flux.

**ZH:** I always say that the urban makes me delirious, that I am in love with any urban space you throw me in, Beirut being one of them. Also being in London now, I'm walking around going 'aahhh'. Yes, the urban, I think, features really intensely in all my books, all my writing.

**DT:** Yesterday, I recorded what will come to be episode 100. One of the subjects of the podcast is a Sudanese-American writer, Safia Elhillo. There are a lot of links between the use of Arabic phrases in the same 'disjointed' idea of movement and flow, and using whatever's appropriate in the time. I was struck by the phrase, 'Arabizi'.

**ZH:** You're talking about the intro, right, where I'm introducing at the beginning of the book, a note on Arabic words and transliteration? So I had to think at one point how to write the Arabic words or expressions in that book. There were different methods I used, depending on the poem and its tone. Some poems and some parts of the book, it's in Arabic, in the Arabic language, as it is, and other instances, I had to transliterate, as in use the English alphabet to write an Arabic word. There is the older method of transliteration, where the sound, for

example, like 'butt-er', how would you transliterate the sound 'er' in the middle of a word, and we have that in Arabic and that used to be an apostrophe, or something, and I used that.

There is also 'Arabizi'. Arabizi is something, I'm not sure how it came about, but we use it mostly in texting, like when the phones did not have the Arabic alphabet yet, or maybe you're not used to switching and writing in Arabic, so you want to write your mum something in Arabic, but using the English alphabet, so the number 7 came about to represent the 'huh' sound, the number 2 is the 'uh' and the number 3 is the 'ah'. So one of my chapbooks actually is called the 3arabi Song and if you see the cover of 3arabi Song, it reads, if you don't know the system, it reads as '3arabi', it's 3arabi Song, because the number 3 looks like the letter 'ah' in the Arabic alphabet.

So it's like something used very informally in the Arab world, we're using texting, and I know that some people really look down on that being used in poetry, like you're betraying the Arab language, but I used it where I thought it was appropriate, where the tone of the poem was that of a text message, where it makes sense that I use Arabizi, so that's how I navigated these different transliteration systems.

**DT:** I really liked it. I had no idea what the sounds were when I was reading it. Also, the connection between your writing and Safia's is by leaving the phrases in, it's more appropriate, because part of the point is that some of these words will be missed in the translation.

**ZH:** Yes, they will be missed and also we actually do use them this way. We write this way, even Arabs among one another. When I text my husband, when I text my mum, I use Arabizi. It does exist in our reality. There's no point saying 'No, I only write in the Arabic alphabet when I send messages to my mother'. Not true. I do both.

**DT:** There should be a way to communicate, because I can't text 'butt-er' the way I say it. I should get in touch with Nokia about it.

**ZH:** You should put a 2 in the middle, so 'bu-2-er'.

**DT:** I think we'll take a second reading.

**ZH:** Right, let's read You Fixed It. That's a poem I don't usually read, because it's a bit difficult to read. I don't know why, just voicing it is difficult, but I found out I should read it more often and I think this poem is inspired by my home town, Tripoli, Lebanon, rather than Beirut. I'm looking at whether there are references I should explain before reading. No, I think they're pretty much self-explanatory. So this is called;

#### YOU FIXED IT

And if the compass broke you fixed it, fastened  
the pencil to it with a rubber band,  
and if there was no hot water you fixed it, learnt  
to sit on that plastic stool in the bathroom

and count, and if it was too cold outside  
 you fixed it, and there was the smell of burnt  
 lemon on brazier, or the *click*  
*click click* of the gas heater.  
 And if you were bored you fixed it, learnt to cut  
 paper and colour the scraps, learnt to write  
 on the walls, and if you wrote on the walls you  
 fixed it, scrubbed them with your mom who yelled  
 at your big brother who what on earth  
 was he doing just watching? And if the TV blurred  
 you fixed it, adjusted the antenna to catch  
 those Japanese cartoons translated into Arabic  
 on the Syrian channel, and if the cartoons  
 hadn't begun you fixed it, danced  
 to those nationalistic Syrian songs about Hafiz, repeated  
*ya hala ya hala ya hala heh*. And if you didn't have enough  
 books you fixed it, read that French-Arabic dictionary the size  
 of your torso, stared at the words *crépuscule* and شفق.  
 And if you tripped on the missing tile you fixed it,  
 learnt to count your steps in the dark  
 afternoon without electricity, and if there was no  
 electricity you fixed it, gauged  
 how dark it was by whether or not you could see  
 your thumb, and if you couldn't see your thumb  
 you fixed it, got the candle from under the sink,  
 and if the sink was leaking you fixed it, tied  
 a cloth to the pipe, and if the pipe burst  
 you fixed it, pressed your palms  
 against the hole in the wall until  
 Mom called the grocer to call the butcher to call  
 the plumber next to him, and if there was a hole  
 in your sock you fixed it, learned to fold it  
 under your big toe. And if your window shattered  
 you fixed it, taped cardboard to the frame,  
 and if someone died you fixed it by telling stories  
 about how crusty their *lahm bi 'ajeen* was,  
 and if the *lahm bi 'ajeen* was too crusty  
 you fixed it by dipping it in the tahini,  
 and if your sorrowhardened you fixed it  
 by dipping it in seawater, and if your country  
 hardened, if your country hardened you fixed it  
 by dipping it in song.

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**DT:** Thank you Zeina. Leading on, it would be nice to talk about ideas of responsibility and obligation. Because on Saturday, when we met after the London Poetry Magazine Fair, we were talking about our obligations towards other poets and how we pass on our knowledge. Either by going into education or starting events and giving people a platform. Maybe we could begin by talking about Punch, which you started and run in Dubai.

**ZH:** When did I start Punch? It was about 4 ½ years ago. When I moved to Dubai, there were no poetry readings, only a collective run by my very good friend, a Palestinian filmmaker and poet, Hind Shoufani, called Poeticians at the time. I read with them, but they had less and less events. I wanted more events, both the chance to read and the chance to listen to other people reading, just out of a very selfish need to connect with other people in the city who love poetry, who love literature, like where are you? I need people to talk to about all of this. That's how Punch came about.

Usually, I try to strike a sort of balance where I ask certain poets I know would read well and also, have an open mic, where people just email me and sign up. I try to have at least 8-10 people on the open mic, depending on the time and the readers. That's how it's been and it's grown. We started with 30 people in the audience. Now every time we do a Punch night, we have something between 80-100 people in the audience. It's created this communal safe space, where people come up and read and be welcomed, then linger afterwards and discuss poetry and spoken word and have conversations about literature and just meet people who are interested in what you are interested in.

So that's what we've been doing. It's quite energy-consuming for me to do it. I'm trying to be more relaxed about it and say, just put a date, run it and go with it, and so it's becoming easier every time. It's always fun to host. I do have fun just hosting, it's very, very laid-back, cracking jokes, getting the audience to shout and filming them. We do silly stuff and also read poetry.

I think it's necessary to have those spaces in the city and it's not always good readings that you get, so on the open mic, you will get people where you sometimes wince and say 'On my God, what are you doing?' But that's OK, that too is necessary. You also get people on the open mic who shock you in a very pleasant way. They're usually younger, still students at school, maybe 17, 18-year-olds who have a big personality.

**DT:** Isn't it disgusting how some young people are so talented? I don't go to events anymore, it makes me feel horrible!

**ZH:** They are ahead of us. So I think it's necessary for a city to have these spaces. I did not grow up with these spaces. I definitely had nowhere to go to express myself when I was 17 or 18. I'm really glad we had no videos or cameras. The 17-year-old me might have put something on You Tube that I would have cried watching now. That protected me to a certain extent.

**DT:** My sibling has just started recording music, doing open mics, singing and playing the guitar. I'm 19 years older and can't begin to contemplate how it would feel to be filmed on your very first performance. There are elements of open mic that might make you cringe, but

it's vitally important for people to have a space. In what way do people then go on to discuss ideas about poetry?

**ZH:** Just at these events, they end up discussing, but I think friendships are formed that don't necessarily include me. Friendships in the audience are formed and discussions are formed. People come up to you and ask you a question about poetry, and how do you publish, and what do you suggest I do. It's on the spot. I could take it further if I wanted to, maybe, and have a Punch workshop every now and then when we sit and discuss stuff. I just don't have the time to do that right now, but that could happen.

After Punch, other poetry collectives in Dubai started forming, mainly the Dubai Poetry Slam, who are younger than us. Again. I hate them. Younger than us, but what's really nice is the Dubai Poetry Slam people are almost always there at the Punch night. I try to be at their events as much as possible. We tweet each other. We're not divas, it's like yes please, the more the merrier. What I would like Punch to do is also maybe inspire someone in the audience to start their own night, whether it be something curated, or open mic, or just a workshop where we're saying 'let's talk about poetry'. Anything, just to tell the younger people to just start something, don't be scared, and see what happens.

**DT:** Before we finish with a third reading, could you tell people where to check you out?

**ZH:** So they can go to [www.zeinahashembeck.com](http://www.zeinahashembeck.com) It's not an easy name to spell out. Everything's on my website, even a link to how they might order all the collections. This particular book is out from Bauhan Publishing, because it has won the 2016 May Sarton New Hampshire Poetry prize, a yearly prize that they organise. They can purchase it online. I know my publisher has a distributor here in the UK. It will be in some book stores, but I have no idea where. I'm going to give the Poetry Library two copies, so it will be here.

You Fixed It ended with 'And if your country hardened, you fixed it with song' and I think that is a central idea in the book, the fact that yes, there are wars around us that we witness every day in the Arab world and we should witness that and write about that, which is something I do throughout the collection, but there's also lots of celebration and singing and resisting grief. I think this poem does that. It fixes it with song, or tries to fix it with song.

The poem is titled after an Arabic song by the Algerian singer Warda, *Fi Yom Wi Leila*, which means 'in a day and a night'. There's a point here where it goes 'Fi Marlboro, fi Viceroy, fi Gitanes', we have those cigarettes. So this is;

#### FI YOM WI LEILA

Spare me this Arab love for dictators tonight.  
Come closer, listen – Warda is singing,  
*Fi Yom Wi Leila*. This day, this night, let us.  
Push this talk of the land to the side. Spare me  
this Arab love for conspiracy tonight. Lower your voice  
to the sound of my pupils. Look at me. Let's music  
instead, let's cigarette, let's wine and laughter. Let's call



friends. Remember how our mothers used to serve cigarette packs on trays to their guests?

*Fi Marlboro, fi Viceroy, fi Gitanes*, they said.

Every house had them cigarette trays. Some nights the politics settled with the ashes, and the jokes came, the clapping, the *Allah Allah* rising with the smoke, the dancing. Time tortures everyone. Let's heal a little. Ask me if I could ever love again. Let's exaggerate. Ask me if there will ever be arms like mine. Warda is singing she'd been missing you long before she'd met you. I missed you before I met you too. And now, *habibi*, even more.

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**DT:** Thank you very much, Zeina.

**ZH:** You're welcome. I was quite distracted. At some point in my head, with the Allah Allah, I was like 'Am I going to be arrested now in the middle of the Royal Festival Hall?'

**DT:** Thank you, and thank you to Raymond for introducing us.

**ZH:** Yeah, shout out to Raymond.

**End of transcript.**