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[Episode 58: Amir Darwish](#) – (February 2016)

Host: Lizzy Palmer – LP

Guest: [Amir Darwish](#) – AD

Transcript edited by David Turner – 17/01/17

**Conversation:**

**LP:** Hello, my name is Lizzy Palmer and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Today I am in my house and I'm joined by the poet Amir Darwish. Hello Amir.

**AD:** Hello Lizzy.

**LP:** How are you?

**AD:** I'm fine, not bad.

**LP:** Nice to see you. So, as we always do with these short podcasts. We will start with a poem. Please.

**AD:** Sure.

Stand up and walk

Stand up and walk.  
Breathe in and hold your breath.  
Keep your head up,  
Place two hands on the floor  
And push your body into a standing position.  
Wipe your feet clean  
Watch out for dust between the toes,  
Then breathe out and walk.  
Do it now  
Please  
Stand up and walk.

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**LP:** Great, thank you. So my first question, as it always is, is why poetry?

**AD:** Er poetry is a tool of course to use the gift of language that humans have that provides a channel to assemble language in a way that can express happiness, sadness, grief and other emotions... Emotional states that humans have.

And it also allows us to say too much in little and too little in too many words. So that for me is what makes poetry different.

**LP:** Great, so what have been your main influences as a writer?

**AD:** As writer and as a poet that would be nature and people for me, the main influences for sure. As it is difficult to get what man makes or human makes to be done by nature or the other way around. Nature also cannot make sometimes what humans make. I don't know if a tree can make a car, that's not possible but humans can make cars... And the same way human cannot make a mountain, they can plant a tree but not make a tree. So that's why I've got these two influences. Because they are distinctive particular and different. Where that uniqueness and both, makes them interesting and always influences me.

**LP:** Do you perform your poetry much?

**AD:** I do. Particularly in festivals, events and perhaps in poetry festivals mainly is where it's happening, where I perform my poetry. I'm not sure whether I'm performing the poetry or reading the poetry. I myself am confused between the two at the moment. [**LP:** Okay] I want to decide for myself whether I am performing a poem or reading it.

**LP:** Yeah, okay. And do you have any influences when it comes to the performance side of poetry?

**AD:** Yeah, if my senses picks up certain things while I'm visiting, that will influence. It depends on the people there, the audience if they are poets. The number of audience of course. The space, that all will influence how I read.

**LP:** Yeah, so you kind of get a feel for it as you go?

**AD:** Yeah, I'll get a feel for it as I go and perhaps it will connect to your last... The one before last, question where it will decide whether it's going to be more like performance like or more like a reading.

**LP:** Yeah, great. On that note shall we have another poem?

**AD:** Yeah.

### The brain

Sometimes it chews itself  
Into a walnut or a fig  
Full of seeds when halved

Other times  
It's a poet searching for a word  
Sharp as an Arabian sword.

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**LP:** Thank you. So, I've read your collection. Don't Forget The Couscous. It seems that much of your poetry is influenced quite heavily by your middle-eastern identity. Your use of imagery, sorry imagery and iconography around this is very strong and very beautifully written as well. So I was just wondering if that is simply to communicate a sense of what your home is like or whether there are different intentions behind that?

**AD:** Um, that's probably the most interesting question so far. Well they were all interesting but... [**LP:** The least vague?] Perhaps I'll comment first on the expression of Middle Eastern identity. For me it becomes boring thing when it's identity or the concept of identity sticks to a singular column and we cling to it tightly.

Whereas, equally it becomes a point of positive curiosity and interest, when one applies the multiplicity to it. For example, if someone writes in the morning then goes to yoga class, then eats kebab then meets an Arab friend for shisha before goes back home to English

girlfriend or English wife. That will open much wider, kind of, an ocean of curiosity. Rather than just being with a certain identity.

**AD:** That said, I think references in my poetry to that Middle Eastern identity you mention signals my failing to explore that multiplicity which I'm working on at the moment. It wouldn't be a reference to home as such... Or there are references to home with these and iconography as you called them. That I think is a wonderful word. But more to offer a glimpse into the cultural background I come from. That's more so, the use of these references.

**LP:** So you're from Syria?

**AD:** Yes, I'm a Syrian-Kurd. Yes.

**LP:** So do you find... I mean how long have you been in in London for now?

**AD:** London, I moved to London in December, December last year. 2015.

**LP:** So do you... Have you found that those influences we were speaking about and the images and iconography has that become apparent in your poetry more since you've been away from there or has it always been a factor in your writing?

**AD:** It has become more of course when I am away from there. Nostalgia and always the past experiences for a poet or a person. They will always play a part in life so they have become more since I left that place.

**LP:** So we've already mentioned your collection. Could you maybe tell us a bit more about what else you've got going on at the moment in terms of projects and work?

**AD:** At the moment I've got... I'm working on an autobiographical novel or narrative with their name, From Aleppo Without love as in with the novel, From Russia With Love.

It is the project of course that speaks of childhood experiences. And it centres around the 1980s, 1990s Aleppo and northern Syria and up until my departure from Syria which is in 1997, 1998 around that time. It has several themes as in anti-patriarchy in the Arab world, pro-feminism. That's mainly, my main concern at the moment, that work. Almost my entire attention is around it.

Apart from that I've got a few festivals that are coming up. Teeside T-junction Festival in the northeast, Bradford Literary Festival and Ledbury poetry festival, literary festival. That's what's going on at the moment.

**LP:** Great, so maybe we could have our third and final poem here?

**AD:**            Dream

You are in a beautiful place  
              Dusk strikes.  
Grass quakes beneath your feet.

In the distance a gazelle gazes.  
Trees roar with winds.  
Branches clap and leaves swing  
Right,  
Left  
And centre  
To embrace the muddy soil.

The dark mountain has a snowy peak,  
As if a bottle of milk was spilt on a black table.

Everything in this vision must stay this way.

The phone rings.  
The dream ends.

Never mind,  
Tonight you will fall asleep again and go back there.

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**LP:**    Thank you. I was just wondering if you have any recommendations for our listeners to go and check out. It doesn't necessarily have to be poetry. Could be some other kind of literature or theatre. Anything that you've seen recently that you found to be interesting.

**AD:**    Yeah, I think people can read whatever they like, of course. The very thought to tell people what to read is a good enough reminder and thankfully that we are in a country that offers freedom of speech, freedom of choice and we are free to read whatever. [**LP:** Of course.]

But having said that the beautiful way that the Lebanese philosopher, painter and artist Gibran Khalil Gibran knitted words in his work, *The Prophet*. Perhaps, is a wonderful work to look at. So, Gibran Khalil Gibran's book *The Prophet* is an interesting one.

**LP:**    Is that one that you've read recently or?

**AD:**    I've looked at it recently and I've read before. He had such a great gift to dilute big ideas and to see through a glass of water for people to drink and Gibran does that.

**LP:** That's a lovely way of putting it. That's great. So, finally, where can people find out more about your work. Aside from attending all the festivals that you'll be reading this year?

**AD:** I am active on social media on Facebook and Twitter. So, I often tweet where my work is being published or what will be published next and where I'll be attending to read. So my Facebook is [Amir Darwish](#) and Twitter account is [Darwish underscore Amir](#).

**LP:** Great. So as usual we'll put those links underneath the video when posting. I think that's it. Thank you very much.

**AD:** Thank you very much for having me.

**LP:** You're welcome, lovely to have you. Thanks, everyone for listening. Bye bye.

**End of transcript.**