



Asma Al Zarooni

The distinguished Emirati writer inspired by life in 1960s Sharjah

Writer and poet Asma Al Zarooni has had a role in every facet of Sharjah's literary scene: she's the former deputy chairperson of the Emirates Writers Union, a founding member of the UAE Women Writers Association and a contributor to major local newspapers and magazines



'A writer is like a photographer,' says Asma Al Zarooni. 'I see and observe with my pen.' The Emirati novelist and poet is seated at a table in Sharjah Library in Cultural Square, where she spends most of her day absorbed in her writing. Even when she's not working, pen and notebook accompany Al Zarooni everywhere. Born in 1961, Al Zarooni is a writer, educator and longtime member of the Emirates Writers Union, founded in 1984 in Sharjah. She served as its deputy chairperson for 16 years and is the former editor in chief of the literary journal Bait Al Sard (House of Narrative), one of four quarterlies published by the union.

Her writing repertoire is a combination of novels, children's stories and collections of short stories and poetry, and she has been published in Sharjah-based daily newspaper Al Khaleej. She writes a weekly column in Al Roeya newspaper on subjects such as her memories of listening to Egyptian radio station Sawt Al Arab and her musings on 'Bilal', a 2015 animated film about the first muezzin in Islamic history. Al Zarooni is something of an authority in the UAE's literary circles: in the last five

WRITER Hind Mezaina
PHOTOGRAPHER Mahra Al Mheiri



As a child I used to write in my father's notebooks

أسماء الزرعوني



years, she's been selected numerous times to appear on panels and give talks at the Sharjah International Book Fair, on topics such as the blurred lines between genres and the social novel – of which she's a champion.

Al Zarooni recalls that her love of books and reading began with browsing through her father's library at home, sampling poems by Al Mutanabbi here and Arabic translations of Hafez there – even when, she confesses, she was far too young to understand these works. 'When I was growing up, I mostly read Egyptian authors like Naguib Mahfouz and Ihsan Abdel Quddous. I was experiencing the streets of Egypt through their books,' she says. 'Nowadays I'm reading Elif Şafak's "The Forty Rules of Love".'

HM When did you start writing?

AZ I started writing in primary school. I used to really enjoy free-writing classes. One time, I submitted a story to a Kuwaiti magazine called Alam Al Fann (The World of Art) that got published. I also used to listen to the radio regularly and submitted short stories to open calls from radio stations. As a child I used to write in my father's notebooks too. He would see my writings and laugh. He never questioned me, and that encouraged me. I published my first children's short stories in 1992 and a collection of short stories in 1994. My stories have been included in school curriculums in the UAE.

HM What was it like getting published in those early days of your career?

AZ I would try to give prominence to the title of the book on the cover and have my name appear in smaller font in the bottom corner. In magazine interviews, I wouldn't include photos of myself. Once, I was pictured in Al Khaleej newspaper and I had to buy all the copies sold near my house.



01 Al Zarooni carries a notebook and pen on her at all times, distrusting laptops. 'I get paranoid about computer viruses,' she laughs

02 'Hams Al Shawati Al Farigha' ('The Whisper of Empty Beaches'), her short story collection published in 2010, sits atop a pile of books at Sharjah Library



03 The author says she doesn't believe in strict writing regimens. 'When an idea or words comes to me, I write them down immediately'

