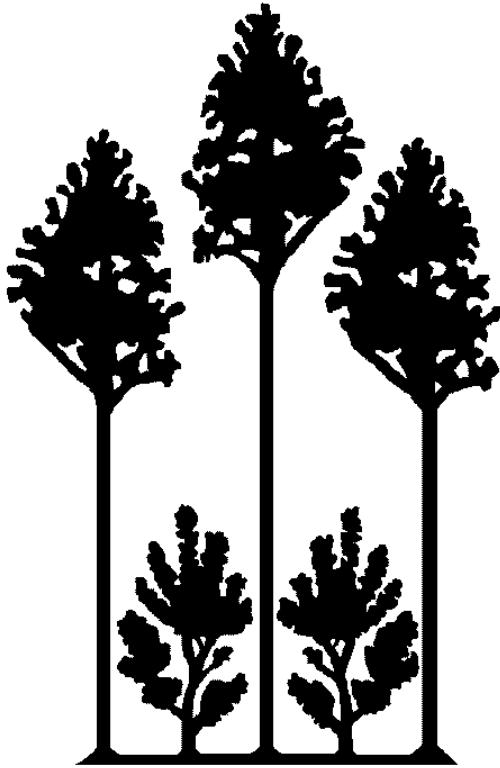


# Discovering English Ghazal

By Zahhar



*Journeys Into Poetic Forms*

*Volume I, Series I: Ghazal*

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### **Front Cover**

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Some of these ghazals have previously been accepted for publication:

LYNX (online publication)

<http://www.ahapoetry.com/ahalynx/>

Living Waters – (ghazal #21)

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These Aged Pines – (ghazal #19)

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The Ghazal Page (online publication)

<http://www.ghazalpage.net/>

Moonset – (ghazal #17)

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Pegasus

P.O. Box 61324, Boulder City, NV 89006

Perseverance – (ghazal #53)

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The Muse Apprentice Guild (online publication)

<http://www.muse-apprentice-guild.com/>

Inspiration – (ghazal #29)

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Two Ladies – (ghazal #44)

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Disharmony – (ghazal #43)

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Bristlecone – (ghazal #52)

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**Note on titles:** A parenthesized portion of each ghazal title contains a numeric indicator. This number simply indicates the order in which the ghazals have been written.

## What's a Ghazal and Where Did It Come From?

The ghazal is not native to English or western cultures. It was originally a Persian form of panegyric poetry called *qasida*. These poems were written in praise of Persian emperors or their noblemen. It was a portion of this *qasida* called *tashbib* that was separated and eventually evolved into the ghazal by the end of the first millennium AD. Over the course of centuries, the ghazal was accepted into several Eastern cultures to be written, read and sung prodigiously in languages such as Arabic, Hindi and Urdu.

Ghazals were most likely introduced to English readers through translations from classical Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafiz. It is only relatively recently that English poets have taken on writing original English ghazals. Unfortunately, English scholars generally seem to have little real respect for the history and tradition of poetic forms from other cultures and will “interpret” such forms into an English *something* that lacks even a slight resemblance to the original form. The ghazal has not been immune to such loose interpretations into English. One book that comes to mind is *The Night Abraham Called to the Stars* by Robert Bly. Though Bly calls the works in this book ghazals, they are nothing of the sort.

It was only after consulting a number of sources that I began to see the English ghazal. Very few have actually been written. This is understandable given the incredibly restrictive nature of the form. There seem to be ten solid points that can be used to define the English language ghazal:

- 1) The ghazal is comprised of couplets. Each couplet stands alone as a complete poem. The idea is to make the ghazal like a pearl necklace. The necklace (ghazal) as a whole is striking, but each pearl (couplet) may stand alone in its own beauty and completion of expression. So, the ghazal is not a poem in itself, but a collection of poems in the form of couplets.

English writers tend to interpret this idea in very personal ways. However, to provide a measurable context, it is safe to say that however a couplet reads, it must end in a definitive fashion as if a concluding period could occur at the close of the second line.

- 2) While the first and second lines of each couplet together often complete a thought, they are themselves each thoughts with some degree of independence. Hence a natural, brief pause ought to occur at the end of the first line in completion of the first half of the thought.
- 3) There are between 5 and 15 couplets.
- 4) The second line of every couplet closes with a refrain.
- 5) In the opening couplet, both the first and second lines close with the refrain.

- 6) The refrain is a word or brief phrase. When a phrase is used, it contains no more than three words.
- 7) A mono-rhyme is used throughout the couplets. The rhyme terminates at the syllable before each refrain. So, the rhyme is used twice in the first couplet and once on the second line of every couplet ensuing. If there are 15 couplets, the mono-rhyme is used 16 times. This can get interesting.
- 8) Except for the fact that each couplet uses a refrain, there is no end rhyme. However, end rhyme may be introduced as a *compliment* to the form. If end rhyme is used in any manner, it is used in conjunction with the mono-rhyme, not in place of it.
- 9) Each line throughout the poem uses the same meter.

Here it is worth noting that traditional ghazals use one of 19 specific meters. But, so far, I have not figured out a way to make an English ghazal adhere to any of these meters. I believe the variation of English accents makes this pretty much impossible to accomplish, so it seems my only choice for now are the metric structures found in English prosody.

- 10) The poet uses his or her penname in the final couplet. This reference can be made on the first or second line of the final couplet. This is sometimes called the “signature couplet”. Traditional poets writing ghazals have often used this as a means of opening a sort of dialogue with themselves.

In my ghazals, the penname used is Zahhar.

In reading many loose adaptations of the ghazal, I have found that the only points above used with some consistency are 1, 3 and 8.

Ghazals translated into English seem to also use points 2 and 10. Where translations are concerned, this makes perfect sense because words that rhyme in Eastern languages will not rhyme in English and rarely will Eastern phraseologies used with a refrain translate directly into English phraseologies. The translations themselves are not “ghazals”, but they certainly are “ghazal translations”.

## Reason

The adventure began in 1983, when I was 12 years old and living in a group home for children. Here I discovered a book, *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, and cracked it open to see what was inside. I was instantly delighted as much by its poetry as by its organization of theme. All poems in this good-sized tome were highly structured, rhyming poems. There were many quatrains, sonnets and couplets, but there were other forms that I even today don't know the names of. One such form that comes to mind is the form used by George H. Miles in his most beautiful work of art, *Said the Rose*. Years later, this is still a favorite of mine and I've even put it to song.

In moving toward adulthood, I discovered that there were unstructured prose-like writings that were also called poems. While these lacked the beauty and precision of structured poetry, they were sometimes quite vivid and meaningful. In time I began to explore this free verse in my own writing. In fact, in my struggle to find some acceptance among circles of modern poetry, whose members often hold a heavy disdain toward structured forms, I eventually abandoned structured poetry entirely. Yet, my heart always yearned for a return to my first love.

The ghazal was almost completely alien to English literature. So, what is it about this form of writing that captured my heart and mind, my complete attention? I'm really not quite sure. However, I can tell of how I discovered the ghazal. During the Summer 2001 semester at the college I sometimes attend, I showed a sample of my free verse to an English teacher, and she *scoffed at it*. She told me that until I could write structured poetry, I was not actually breaking rules I knew to write free verse. I was amazed that someone still "believed in" structured poetry. She showed me a villanelle and upon seeing it I told her such a thing would be no trouble for me. The look on her face made it clear she thought otherwise. But, she could have no idea that structured poetry is my *first* love. So I went to find out about villanelles, and in so doing I came across terzanelles. When I completed two villanelles to show to this teacher, I went on to write a series of terzanelles. In finding out about the terzanelle, I stumbled across ghazals and made a mental note to return to the subject.

I did return to the subject upon completing "Fragments", a poem consisting of seven terzanelles. Information about the ghazal was scattered. Multiple sources contradicted one another, and I was left to find Arabic and Farsi speaking individuals online to tell me what ghazals were so I could begin representing them properly in English.

What I also discovered is that most English language *poems* that want to be called ghazals are actually, at best, a sort of loose hybrid, a *paraghazal*. I read articles by scholars wanting to declare this or that *interpretation* as the proper English ghazal. I couldn't take the articles seriously. I knew I could write ghazals with respect to its tradition and without interpretation.

This collection begins to explain my reason for writing ghazals and my reason for writing poetry in general.

## English Ghazal – (ghazal #41)

The soul its depths may know within the amorous ghazal  
So poignant as it may within the dolorous ghazal.

What forms with simple ease in languages of the East  
Stands impervious to English, the onerous ghazal.

Dare not disgrace the history and beauty of its form  
With bold attempts to reinvent the canorous ghazal.

Well before the very first of English words were formed,  
A wonder spread by poets was the prosperous ghazal.

This heart had lost its aspect in the dismal realms of grief  
But found its shape anew within the rapturous ghazal.

In time a stone shapes well within the sculptors mindful care;  
As such, the mind is honed that works the rigorous ghazal.

Blessed profoundly is the heart and all its depths fulfilled  
That strives to form in English mold the decorous ghazal.

The ghazal's essence flows within the spirit of Zahhar;  
Let this be an example of the flavorful ghazal.

## Offering – (ghazal #61)

I trudge now back through this grime for you  
Because it may ease the climb for you.

Because you just might learn from my pain,  
I re-walk that bitter rime for you.

I'm told there are riches deep within,  
So I search this fetid slime for you.

I seek rubies in the cave of loss,  
Yet I'm glad to spend the time for you.

The earth and stars all could have been mine,  
But I've passed these chances prime for you.

I'll peel the rind and my soul expose,  
Then wait as a silent mime for you.

Pearls were buried with my heart, you see,  
So I dig back through the lime for you.

If in your depths these words resonate,  
Zahhar is sounding a chime for you.

## Reforming Words – (ghazal #30)

Touched by majestic magic founding words,  
My thoughts are full of most astounding words.

Scribed in languages long before our own,  
Their gifts were wrought in strong redounding words.

Angelic tongues, now half forgotten lore,  
Unlocked the secrets with expounding words.

Clear they expressed the space between the poles,  
Yet time has changed them to confounding words.

The place where dreams began and dreams will end  
Can hardly be explained through bounding words.

With antiquated brush her symbols formed;  
With modern key they still are grounding words.

Until that shore lost in the haze is reached,  
Our hearts will be pursued by hounding words.

Reformed again from aeons lost diffused,  
Zahhar begins anew in sounding words.

## Path – (ghazal #60)

With breaking dawn, there rose a bright destiny,  
Where only the blind could never sight destiny.

Before these atoms even formed the flesh,  
This heart was gripped within a tight destiny.

Sloshing in the womb that cursed this life,  
I never had the power to fight destiny.

Mid this storm are strikes of realization,  
But thunder rattles into flight destiny.

Beating drums mete out a promise within  
Until I strain to meet this light destiny.

This dream is battered in the raging rush,  
Crashing in rapid rocky white destiny.

The broad and beaten way is trampled bare  
By those who from their lives smite destiny.

Don't lament on how this way's obscured;  
Not even all the winds can write destiny.

Proud slaves of Mammon scoff at those with little,  
Yet they are weighed with woe who spite destiny.

Though we may rip from all the earth her beauty,  
This sin is not enough to blight destiny.

Braced for the pending break, Zahhar, your tense;  
Still you must wait; you cannot cite destiny.

## Expressions

I see the poem as something of a verbal sculpture or painting. When I sit down and begin sculpting, or painting, a poem, I see an internal representation of the poem and what I wish for it to *look* like. I try to use the chisel of grammar and the colors of language to manifest that representation.

Though I sometimes see straightforward visual scenes from life, like the moonset or the ocean, I normally see concepts and feelings. Often, this is what I try to paint, or sculpt. The following ghazals are chosen for this section because I felt they were more successful than usual in manifesting a particular internal representation within the garden walls of the ghazal.

## Inspiration – (ghazal #29)

*For Yvonne*

In the face of utterly daunting odds,  
You found strength in your heart for flaunting odds.

In thunderous display dark clouds amassed,  
But you stood tall mid the gloom taunting odds.

At your living soul ferocious winds tore,  
Yet still you held strong against gaunting odds.

The landscape of your life quaked asunder;  
Still, you found balance in hope-wanting odds.

Struck blow after blow by unyielding pains,  
You would not succumb to the haunting odds.

How can Zahhar be but deeply inspired  
By such courage shown midst doom-vaunting odds.

## Two Ladies – (ghazal #44)

### *Bonnie and Her Double Bass*

Gentle strokes become a sensitive sound,  
From hands not made to form a primitive sound.

Strung with fine equine hair, her back-bent bow  
Flies sharp arrows of intuitive sound.

She holds her aspect with a tender care;  
Lost in sway they dance interpretive sound.

Her buxom mold embraced within her arms,  
They share richness through a secretive sound.

With countenance relaxed to peace profound  
Her heart sings to trees a lenitive sound.

Her ornate wooden scroll soft on her cheek,  
They are beauty with a volitive sound.

They are a blessing to your soul Zahhar,  
Never tire of their fruitive sound.

## Disharmony – (ghazal #43)

There broke a cherished harmony, a bright and resonant string,  
Which dulled the pleasant timbre for every consonant string.

It never came to haunt me, that I could lose this joy;  
I lived with the assumption this was a permanent string.

Your joyful lyric friendship, now missed with pain each day,  
Filled all my heart with music; you were an eminent string.

The new-strung wire is always just losing its pleasant tone,  
And never sounds the same as its broken assonant string.

Though I may play the melodies that always moved my soul,  
The depth is somehow lessened by a slightly dissonant string.

The chords we shared are silent, now dead within my heart;  
For who could hear the color in such an immanent string?

Who else could ever share it, the music that we played?  
Zahhar has lost forever the only pertinent string.









































## Wrapping It Up

This is the first chapbook in a series of four. This also begins the first of what will eventually be several series. Collectively, the series is *Journeys Into Poetic Forms*, a long-term personal exploration of, and evolution in, poetry.

## Thoughts

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## **Contact**

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