

Uncovering English Ghazal

By Zahhar



Journeys Into Poetic Forms

Volume II, Series I: Ghazal

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Front Cover

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Acknowledgements

Some of these ghazals have previously been accepted for publication:

The Ghazal Page (online publication)

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

Sleep – (ghazal #45) 26

LYNX (online publication)

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

Exploitations – (ghazal #26) 20

The Muse Apprentice Guild (online publication)

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

Lour – (ghazal #57) 10

Blasphemy – (ghazal #56) 19

Dissipation – (ghazal #54) 25

Acorn – (ghazal #63) 31

World Poems (online publication)

<http://art-arena.com/poems.htm>

Dilution – (ghazal #73) 23

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.

Depth, Perception and Meaning

In cultures where the ghazal is cradled, the ghazal seems to be much more than a mere form of poetry. It is a genre that melds literary and musical attributes into its own art form, the ghazal. The closest American equivalent might be the Blues, where melody and meter is every bit as pertinent as lyric, mood and meaning. In many ways, the ghazal is the “soul music” of many Indo-Iranian cultures.

The Indo-Iranian ghazal is a conduit for expression of that which has deeply affected the heart and soul. Poets from these cultures rarely, if ever, treat writing ghazals as an exercise in some obscure poetic form; they approach the ghazal with honor and respect and the intention of using it to convey what has profound meaning to them. When a ghazal is written, a soul is laid bare and exposed. It may be an expression of heart thrilling joy, but more often it is the expression of soul rendering sorrow. Whichever the case, the ghazal both expresses and invokes strong emotion.

The ghazal also seems to hold social value within some Indo-Iranian cultures. Once while sitting in a Denny’s in Palo Alto, California, a group of about nine Punjabi Indians came in and sat at a table near me. They were clearly stopping off for conversation and food after the close of a nearby celebration they attended. During their conversation, three of them suddenly broke into song together and when they stopped, another member suggested they all sing more traditional ghazals. Shortly, the whole table was harmoniously singing a series of ghazals. This went on for nearly an hour.

My exploration of the ghazal began on strictly technical terms in order to develop an intuitive sense of the structure. Upon developing some level of comfort with technicalities, I moved toward putting more of my self, my heart, into each ghazal. Though I felt that only very few might relate to what were, for me, soul rendering experiences, I moved ahead with the project and sought creative, metaphorical and sometimes cryptic ways to bare this soul and heart of mine, to share the experiences of my life and the understandings that have developed as a result. I still ask myself whether or not this counts as “soul rendering”, as I have learned the ghazal must be. But, when I think on that which has been my life, the experiences that nearly extinguished the light of my existence spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically, it occurs to me that perhaps I may be uniquely qualified to tackle the English ghazal. My soul has indeed been rendered apart like that of a shattered crystal, then by some miracle carefully reinstated over a long and arduous healing process. I hope may one day be seen as having offered something tangible and perhaps even valuable to the English renditions of the ghazal.

While crafting ghazals, I have struggled to educate myself about the form and its history. This has been difficult, as there is a language barrier. However, through conversations with those familiar with the ghazal, through listening to ghazal recordings from a dozen languages and through reading ghazal translations to English and related articles, I am learning. As I learn more, my perception of the ghazal evolves, which in turn deepens the depth and meaning of each new ghazal written.

The Eye of the Dragonfly

Because Volume I, “Discovering English Ghazal”, lists the technical aspects of the ghazal, this will not be revisited in Series I.

In Volume I, the first technical point listed was:

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.

Over the course of my exploration of the ghazal, my understanding of what this means has evolved. One book in particular has helped me gain a strong intuitive sense about the nature of the couplet, or *qita*. This book is “The Green Sea of Heaven”, works of a classical Persian poet, Hafiz, translated to English by Elizabeth Gray. A good way to develop an understanding of an art form is to explore works in that art form that have remained extant throughout centuries.

Scholars who have attempted to describe the ghazal in English terms have stressed that there ought be no correlation between couplets, that each couplet should remain completely independent within the ghazal, and that no unity or adherence to theme should occur between couplets. Upon reading this I assimilated this information as part of my technical understanding of the ghazal. Yet, as I read the ghazal translations of Hafiz, I was hit by an epiphany. Each ghazal binds to a theme. In fact, each couplet within Hafiz’s ghazals seems to look at the same thing. It is just that rather than flowing couplet to couplet along the same lines of insight and reflection, each couplet offers a dramatically different perspective of what the ghazal as a whole is focused on. In a way, it is like looking through the eye of a dragonfly, each couplet is a facet in the eye, but the attention of each facet is focused on something in particular.

This understanding resonates with me, such that I endeavor to bring it about in my work. I struggle to write each couplet such that it may be removed from the context of the ghazal and still hold its own value, yet offer a different perspective on something in particular within the context of the ghazal.

The nature of the ghazal is such that it would take far more space to explain one than it does to write one, for each couplet would have to be talked about within the context of the ghazal, then independently from that context. Only from here could I talk about layers of meaning. As such, I do not preface individual ghazals, but groups of them.

Affliction

I have yet to meet anyone immune to affliction. It can take a variety of forms, ranging from spiritual unrest to physical agony. For me, affliction plagued my existence right from the beginning. There was no grace period. These ghazals walk through some of my experiences with affliction.

Throughout the course of my life, I have come to see some of the treasures hidden within affliction as a whole. These ghazals barely touch upon some of this. Mostly, these are lamentations intermixed amongst bold reflection.

These are not written for “therapeutic” reasons. These are written with the hope that they may offer some comfort through relation to those who suffer, or have suffered, afflictions of a similar nature.

Reft – (ghazal #69)

An amber liquid sapped her attention away,
And from her heart stripped loving intention away.

The lonesome wail of hunger competing in vain
Unleashed her rage and tore her abstention away.

It wasn't desire denied with an angry glare,
But painful dearth closed up in detention away.

An oscillation between assurance and terror,
Caused a distress that rent apprehension away.

Angels swept this fragmenting soul to safety,
In lands where shadows shift a dimension away.

Smothered beneath resentment, bitter and fierce,
Any potential was locked from ascension away.

Wound in the Catherine wheel of her deception,
Spirit was ripped in morbid extension away.

Remove from your heart the demon's claw, Zahhar,
Let pass the touch of its dark invention away.

Defeated – (ghazal #65)

In a broken heap on the floor left for dead,
A silenced infant cries no more, left for dead.

Needful love fell in the path of cyclone clouds,
And was crushed by the tempest roar left for dead.

Madly flung against the wall in a bitter rage,
A soul fragmented to its core, left for dead.

Tsunamis swept a child to the ocean's depths,
Who tossed alone in the raging pour left for dead.

Wheezing in a beaten battered lump of clay,
One drifted from the dimming shore left for dead.

Angels knelt beside a baby's silent form—
Shut in darkness behind a door left for dead.

“You're blessed by this pain, Zahhar” said an angel,
“You have learned how need can leave you sore left for dead.”

Omen – (ghazal #64)

Waking from cold abyss to a drifting specter,
This soul was split apart by the rifting specter.

Flushed from the fetid waters of pain and sorrow,
All light was fast eclipsed by a lifting specter.

It came in the dawn of dreaming to haunt these days,
A faceless and faded ever shifting specter.

Seeking in guiltless heart to find its aspect,
This heart was picked apart by the sifting specter.

A barren inner landscape with no horizons,
Was the only handsel from that gifting specter.

From briefly fading mists it made confession—
Your ears, Zahhar, were not for the shrifiting specter.

Injury – (ghazal #62)

She couldn't accept the pain she caused, and named my father;
Through features ravaged deep with guilt she blamed my father.

I could not see through that mad jungle of pain and terror;
Taking advantage of this upset, she framed my father.

A bitter bile of resentment soured her war-torn heart,
Which grew more caustic 'cause she never tamed my father.

Confronted for the truth she hid behind dark eyes,
She just refused in rigid fear, yet shamed my father.

Until he swung within a cage by his own trousers,
The relentless creeping sadness slowly claimed my father.

You know your father soars beyond all grief, Zahhar,
Although this woman's seething cruelty maimed my father.

Lour – (ghazal #57)

From an all pervasive sorrow grew despair,
Till the only taste is strange and skew despair.

There are moments when the dark clouds seem to part,
But they close again, securing new despair.

A thick and sullen mist bedims my soul,
A tragic shroud that clings like dew, despair.

The paths that led to promise each were barred;
Such tense circumstances drew despair.

A gaping dismal grave is hopelessness;
Entombed in part are all who knew despair.

There is no need to roll from my heart the stone;
What can death matter to one in true despair?

Sun, moon, and stars shine forth their steady light,
A light that's doomed to fade in blue despair.

How could Zahhar now know such clarity
Of thought not ever tortured through despair?

Broken – (ghazal #20)

These are simply flattered dreams;
Hollow hopeless plattered dreams.

Empty promise shining dim,
Bound in scope of plattered dreams.

Built to fashion ease from pain,
Doomed to form dark mattered dreams.

These became hope's cornerstone,
Bleak and distant scattered dreams.

Jagged ripping shards cut deep
On spanning field of shattered dreams.

Ravaged hearts lost in despair
Long hold on to tattered dreams.

Release your knuckled grip, Zahhar,
On beaten broken battered dreams.

Narcoleptic – (ghazal #16)

I live between two realms oppressively trapped,
By force unseen long held repressively trapped.

I never feel alive or fully present,
Halfway in Land of Nod recessively trapped.

Tethered to a plane I can't escape,
My doom is to remain impressively trapped.

My struggle for coherent mind is constant,
Held by Morpheus' hand depressively trapped.

I phase like a shade amid the moving world,
By underworld of dreams possessively trapped.

Sometimes seized by an invisible grip,
I fall to paralysis suppressively trapped.

I'm worn by this wrestle for consistency,
Forever snapping back successively trapped.

When will Zahhar rise forth into the light—
Or shall he timeless be regressively trapped?

Paradox – (ghazal #67)

The dream was touched by a protected soul,
And hearts were torn by a rejected soul.

The kindly soul is trampled down, and yet
Malice pervades the most respected soul.

Angry teeth flashed under eyes glazed over;
This face revealed a dark neglected soul.

A scalpel tongue sliced out such acrid words,
All life was bled from that dissected soul.

Rage born of terror broods a bitter bile,
Ruining the will of each subjected soul.

What holds no grief will also hold no joy,
A void that shatters the affected soul.

Mist cannot be marred while crystal fragments—
Both are aspects of the reflected soul.

That darker shadow in the depths of night
In time reveals its own directed soul.

A crazed ceramic pot containing naught
Represents, I hear, a perfected soul.

Patience, Zahhar, for it takes time to heal—
Angels tend your deeply infected soul.

Condition

The human condition is truly perplexing to me. In this set of ghazals I struggle to observe some of the aspects of this condition, the nature of society as a whole, and reflect on these observations.

Human condition is a subject I will return to time and again throughout my life. After all, this condition has grown to pervade nearly every portion of the Earth down to its most remote regions. Abandoned oxygen bottles litter the summits of Mount Everest and K2. The Yukon and McKenzie rivers are peppered with tourists in canoes and kayaks. Isolated desert islands are regularly visited by yachts. If there is anyplace left that could be called remote, it's not on this planet.

Amid this all pervasive human condition, I struggle to remove myself as much as I may and simply observe. This is not in order to gain an understanding of it or change it, but simply in hopes that understanding will develop of its own accord. I have been finding much fulfillment in stepping aside from the values of society and allowing my own system of values to reveal itself.

While these ghazals do allude to some of what I have come to hold as valuable, they mostly focus on general observations of human condition and a recognition of just what an incredible obstacle it is for the human race as a whole to overcome it.

Noise – (ghazal #42)

Meaningless words accrete relentlessly,
Growing in their conceit relentlessly.

Bright words with meaning, swallowed in the storm,
Simply cannot compete relentlessly.

The granules boldly pelt from thrusting winds—
These empty words entreat relentlessly.

Weeds grow enmasse throughout the spanning fields
And glowing words delete relentlessly.

Are truthless proclamations reified
Because the words repeat relentlessly?

Zahhar's own words, though lost in rolling din,
Will not stay in defeat relentlessly.

Antimatter – (ghazal #59)

Faces of plastic speak bold on a name;
Hypnotized masses take hold on a name.

Hollow eyes peer from trademarked heaps,
Laden with burden and tolled on a name.

Fine fibers bolster pompous, round faces,
Procured upon striking gold on a name.

In basements and cellars collecting dust,
Artifacts molder, now old on a name.

Beyond their means the landfills bulge reeking,
Waste by the tonnage all sold on a name.

Only fools, hermits, madmen and vagrants
Carry the sense to stand cold on a name.

No claims can budge Zahhar's apathy,
Who likely never will fold on a name.

Consumption – (ghazal #32)

There spawns in the air a curious monster,
A subtle and dreadfully furious monster.

There rides on the waves deceit to deplore,
Wrought in the form of this spurious monster.

There lures from the streams thin promises vague,
A snare of the dark penurious monster.

There lurks in the homes of people unwitting
Coils that crush from injurious monster.

There slowly devours the souls of the living
The might of an empty incurious monster.

There are souls in silence catabolizing,
Ingested within the luxurious monster.

Beware, Zahhar, of its sinister presence;
Stay clear of the vague usurious monster.

Poverty – (ghazal #58)

It seems we pay a lease of prosperity,
Yet never wear the fleece of prosperity.

Their flocks won't land in places sere, exhausted;
They can't thrive there, the geese of prosperity.

She was blind to her uncle's predacity,
And so was shamed the niece of prosperity;

It is sad that all the horizons fall dark
Under smoke from the grease of prosperity.

Because the wandering beggar justly spoke,
His was an utter cease of prosperity.

Will no-one feel the pain of their heart's torment,
Skewered on twisted kris of prosperity?

Because you bore to the stars your pact, Zahhar,
You won't know just one piece of prosperity.

Blasphemy – (ghazal #56)

Near sighted donkeys bold bray, “Sacrilege!”;
And yet, is not their own way sacrilege?

Fortresses mighty seal the heart from love
‘Till light itself becomes gray sacrilege.

When men in high position lose their faith,
They then make of their faith a sacrilege.

How can we feathers grow to soar in flight,
When we must deem our own clay sacrilege?

The judging stones that crush a stolid face
Create within their own fray sacrilege.

If there is One that language can’t define,
Then how does but a word say sacrilege?

Around the world brave guns and sabers flash;
But, think! How does their rage slay sacrilege?

Both doves and ravens dance upon the winds;
Who calls the way that these pray sacrilege?

And, you, Zahhar, are not above the rest;
Dare not believe that men stay sacrilege.

Exploitations – (ghazal #26)

The masses, forever by greed exploited,
Like the blind follow on and cede, exploited.

At turns, each and all, formal texts are revised,
And made to pay, starved students read, exploited.

Allusions to high fulfillment advertised,
For vapors the unwitting bleed, exploited.

Despite advances, wondrous, in medicine,
The impoverished die in their need, exploited.

Deep within their hearts an ageless blame instilled,
The oppressed of soul live their creed, exploited.

Sadly seduced by a deeply wicked charm,
On deadly smoke the enslaved feed, exploited.

Lands rich in resource swayed by greater powers,
In hopeless vain their peoples plead, exploited.

Wishing he had strength to change humanity,
Zahhar would see not one more deed exploited.

Passing

Perhaps as a result of the conditions that created my childhood afflictions, I went through childhood terribly afraid of dying. I must have been six or so years old when I made the fatal mistake of asking my father what happens after we die. My father, being an atheist, would respond with something along the lines of, “Nothing, when you die it’s all over and there’s just nothing.”

Somehow an intuition told me that this was not the case, even at the age of six. But what a father says to his six year old son can carry a lot of weight. Thus began a terrible conflict between intuitive understanding and understandings imposed upon my thinking by others. My father’s idea of death, for one, made it a terrifying prospect.

Today I have an understanding of death that is difficult to put into words. This understanding has finally returned back to that original intuition granted when I was six years old. As a child, I for some reason believed that this intuition was widespread, that asking about death would bring words that confirmed and clarified an understanding already innate. As an adult I have come to just let the understanding be.

Human language is not designed such to allow concepts so incredibly subtle as death to be properly expressed and understood. However, poetry can offer a conduit for expressing understandings that otherwise defy words. These ghazals explore some of my experiences of loss through death and what has become my understanding of death in general.

Displacement – (ghazal #68)

You left behind a nightmare of ripping loss;
Joy was reaped from the heart by the clipping loss.

Knowing you faded a little more each day,
We tried our best to ignore it, this nipping loss.

Together we shared in brimming abundance, but—
We at the banquet only were sipping loss.

The empty space you filled is empty again;
Wind howls into that vacuum with whipping loss.

Will you now dream of us from that place of dreams,
And pray our hearts to heal from your stripping loss?

Will you with angel feathers we cannot see
Brush past in hopes to console our gripping loss?

Take heart, Zahhar, for your friend has but transformed,
And moved well beyond this realm of slipping loss.

Dilution – (ghazal #73)

A single cloud floats through the night in silence;
Shining in the full moon's light in silence.

We talked of angels, god, and destiny;
Then, off you lifted taking flight in silence.

Deep in the opaque waters of a pond
Shimmers all of heaven's height in silence.

Broken by an unrelenting tempest,
Your bark, listing, sank from sight in silence.

The mountaintop thrusts deep into a mist,
Its peak hidden by the blight in silence.

A shrouding mist now compasses your soul,
Yet still you rise beyond our plight in silence.

This night is passing from your heart, Zahhar,
As here you watch the dawn grow bright in silence.

Evanescence – (ghazal #70)

In the place where I pay homage to the night
I pled your case to stars that strew the night.

From this mountaintop I prayed for you to heal,
In tandem fell two bold stars through the night.

I, too, had walked on that shadow's edge before
And knew you as another who knew the night.

Your journey along the shadow's edge was long,
Then your strength gave out and on you drew the night.

Maybe your soul was healed instead of your form
That we are left in your wake to rue the night.

Now in silence on that mountaintop I gaze
On blurring stars where long I view the night.

Stars reflect in the well-spring of my soul;
I sought a friend, but was left in lieu the night.

Was it your essence in the wind that whispered,
"I'm not lost, Zahhar," as languid grew the night?

Dissipation – (ghazal #54)

The winter's raking shadows leave in time,
And barren lands will blossoms heave in time.

Moonlit cracks within the cobblestone sky,
Reveal more as they part and cleave in time.

Spanning years are not so finely woven—
Remembrance passes through this sieve in time.

Fragments from broken dreams reflect regrets,
But into hopes anew they sheave in time.

Images wove in contrast from the void,
And back to emptiness we weave in time.

Take heart, Zahhar, and breathe a heavy sigh,
For you will cease to hate or grieve in time.

Sleep – (ghazal #45)

Who can remember their race between dreams?
Nothing ever holds its pace between dreams.

A mighty river thunders on its way,
An endless quest for the place between dreams.

Though predators fiercely hunt for your soul,
Know they can never give chase between dreams.

Cloudscapes of splendor vanish in the wind;
Their existence bears no trace between dreams.

This depthless farness mid the burning stars
Is but the motionless space between dreams.

Light ventures through and beyond the abyss,
Yet will never show its face between dreams.

Our pains and sorrows gather fold on fold,
But who can carry their case between dreams?

Your freedom flutters far in flight, Zahhar,
For limitless is the grace between dreams.

Realizations

For some reason, rather than being led to despair, insanity or rigidity by the afflictions, doubts and fears of my life, I was led instead to realizations, one by one. My life has been a constant swing of paradigm shifts and evolution of insight and understanding.

There have been times when a realization hit me so hard that I could only sit and stare off into space for hours, even days, as I worked to digest it. Other realizations have come gently, as if simply looking directly at something that had always been in my peripheral vision.

Realizations, I believe, are essential. For instance, I could not be alive right now if it were not for realizations that allowed me to let go of virulently self destructive thinking and behaviors. In a way, realizations uncover the essence of life and existence bit by bit.

Gradually, it has become my way to seek realization in general. Oddly, I have *realized* that this is best done by not seeking it. Realization is a natural process that cannot be forced. So what I do instead is casually explore places, experiences, memory, philosophies, ideas and more. I do this *without seeking*, but just in the spirit of exploration and openness. I have found that this spirit of exploration seems to create conditions optimal for generating realizations. Such realizations have spanned the spectrum of my entire exposure to everything.

The ghazals in this set walk through some of the realizations closest to my heart. Realizations that inspire my continued exploration of life and influence the way I live.

Shaman – (ghazal #55)

Many veiled by gloom yearn to see in the dark,
Yet ever so few learn to see in the dark.

The bleak abyss conceals a landscape of loss
Where they are lost who spurn to see in the dark.

This pall starves heart and spirit of hope and joy
Save for a few who turn to see in the dark.

Beacons beneath the shadow of lightning clouds
Are those the gift who earn to see in the dark.

Floods of tragedy will not ever swallow
The blessed who remain stern to see in the dark.

A starless night has engulfed his soul before—
Zahhar always shall burn to see in the dark.

Daily Miracles – (ghazal #27)

Embraced by many an elusive miracle,
We endlessly seek the conclusive miracle.

Amazingly unnoticed each passing day,
Is not life itself a protrusive miracle?

New strengths and abilities endlessly learning,
Is not growth a rather conducive miracle?

With kinematic gift of thought and body,
Is not motion, too, a diffusive miracle?

From equilibrium to centripetal force,
Is not balance an all inclusive miracle?

Understanding there are marvels to be found,
Is not cognition an exclusive miracle?

Seek not portents for proof of a designer,
But look, Zahhar, at each occlusive miracle.

Songline – (ghazal #71)

Through this dream there flows an acquiescent song,
An all pervasive evanescent song.

A melody wells forth from where dreams spawn,
An endless rising effervescent song.

From floating whales up to the gliding fowl,
Each understands life's deliquescent song.

The sky itself in eager resonance
Reflects this spectral, iridescent song.

Even the cypress and the stolid oak
Sing in their sap an arborescent song.

In madness have we forced from all our ears
The guidance of a phosphorescent song.

We dream together on the fading lines,
But grow deaf to an incandescent song.

Does Zahhar alone hear upon the winds
The music of this opalescent song?

Finalization

This concludes Volume II of this series. There will be at least two more volumes to come. Exploring the ghazal has been a wonderful and enlightening experience for me. I remain excited about this project and eager to see it through to completion. Writing English ghazals has forced me to learn a great deal about English and myself as a writer of poems. I hope that I will continue to grow within the garden walls of the ghazal throughout my life.

Thank you for taking the time to read this chapbook. I hope that some of the thoughts and expressions herein have been of some value to you.

Thoughts

Thoughts
