

Recovering English Ghazal

By Zahhar



Journeys Into Poetic Forms

Volume III, Series I: Ghazal

Revision 2 – February 2004

Front Cover

The front cover art is from a free clipart web site. I do not remember the name of the site. It was originally a very small black and white pixel-drawn picture of a pine tree. Photoshop 5.0 filters were used to smooth out the pixelation of the original and apply shading after increasing the image's resolution substantially.

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Candelabrum Poetry Magazine Rose Cottage, Threeholes Bridge, Wisbech, PE14 9JR, England Fettered (ghazal #87)	6
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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.

Origin of the Penname Zahhar

In Volume I, “Discovering English Ghazal”, the technical aspects of the ghazal are listed in full. The tenth technical point listed is as follows:

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.

Obviously, Zahhar is not my given name. A lot of time went into deciding what to use as my ghazal penname. In fact, my first few ghazals were written without using a penname at all. In place of the penname, I used two periods “..” to indicate that I planned to fill that space with a word of two syllables. Somehow, I had a feeling the name I eventually chose would be a two syllable word, especially since my first, middle and last names are each two syllables long.

What made deciding on a penname difficult for me is my somewhat irrational feeling that one should not change one’s own given name, under any circumstance. This feeling never included the case of having one’s name changed by a spiritual mentor or the like. In the end, after much debate, I decided that the use of a penname is not the same as changing one’s own given name.

Of course, there is a story behind choosing Zahhar for my ghazal penname. When I was 21 or 22 years old, I had an unusual dream where I met a man who asked me about my life and how I felt about my life. This man was a gentle, soft spoken person. His eyes were full of concern and compassion. In the dream, I recall talking with him openly, answering his questions honestly as thoughtfully as I could.

At the end of our dialog, this man turned to leave. As he walked a few paces away, he became engulfed in light. Not light as we understand it in our shared reality, but something other. The effect was such that it softened his features and made him difficult to focus my eyes on, almost as if he were phasing out of the dimension we shared in the dream. As the light intensified around him, a sort of halo seemed to form over his head. As he turned to face me one last time, the pattern of light forming around him further intensified in a way that gave me the impression of two expanding wings. In that moment, I understood the man to be an angel. As soon as this understanding came to me, he spoke once more before diffusing completely into his light. He said to me, “By the way, your name is not Erin. That is just a temporary symbol. Your true name is something else. I’ll tell it to you. The name of that which you truly are is ‘Zahhar’.”

With those final words, he diffused into his light, phasing beyond my ability to see him. The light that engulfed him could be described as a “white light”, but this would be an inaccurate description. His light appeared white, so far as my immediate perceptions allowed within the realm of the dream, but it was *more than white*.

I remember waking from this dream with my heart pounding. I was not afraid as I woke, or even excited, but my corporal form was reacting quite dramatically from the experience of the dream. My mind raced over the dream, seeking to understand what had just happened. No understanding came, just the memory and puzzle of it. To this day, I can't claim to understand the dream, not even in part. But that name certainly stuck with me.

In the dream, the angel pronounced this name in a particular way. The first syllable of the name consists of a quick “Z” sound followed by a short “ah”. So, in a way, “Z’ah”. The second syllable consists of a medium length “har” sound with some emphasis on the “ah” aspect of the syllable. Originally, I spelled the name “Zahaar”, after the pronunciation of “bazaar”. Though the word “bazaar” wasn't quite right, I figured it was close enough.

Near the middle of 2002, I discovered that there is an Arabic word matching the pronunciation of this name which uses the transliteration “zahhar”. In Arabic, the word has many definitions. The definition I find most interesting is “Vast openness”. I have since learned that this word is also used in Urdu, where it carries a similar meaning.

The most fascinating discovery I have made in relation to “Zahhar” is that a few centuries ago there was an Andalusian poet of this same name. He was a Muslim poet who wrote ghazals in Arabic, none of which have been translated to English that I know of. I have yet to learn anything more about this Andalusian poet and his work, but it is certainly my intent to do so.

So, it was a dream many years ago that is the inspiration behind the penname used in these English ghazals. The message from the angel in the dream still resounds within my thoughts and in my heart. Though I cannot say I quite understand that message, I have a sense of it. Something like: “your true nature is infinitely open.” If this is the case, then the message was not just for me alone.

That which we truly are, each of us, is infinitely open.

Distress

Ghazals are organized in this volume by what I feel their overall mood is.

These seven ghazals seem to carry an air of distress about them, and a struggle to find release from that distress.

Fettered – (ghazal #87)

What world revolves in that plane of dreams
That life is hued with the stain of dreams?

What shadows dance in that realm between
That bears the curse to the brain of dreams?

What needs are wrought by the gift of thought
That sways the fool to the gain of dreams?

What fancies form beyond light's domain
That subjects one to the reign of dreams?

What binding force does the black void spawn
That holds one bound to a chain of dreams?

What grips the mind from those depths unknown
That weighs each day with the strain of dreams?

What terrors writhe in your heart, Zahhar,
That plague your soul with the pain of dreams?

Torn – (ghazal #83)

I came to life in spite of their bad parting,
And formed amidst the storm of their mad parting.

How often I have stared through rain streaked windows;
My guts would knot in vain with each sad parting.

Poorly sown marriages are doomed to fall apart,
And guess who swings between the mom and dad, parting.

One day, alone on the bare, cold breast of earth,
My fractured, fragmenting soul and I had parting.

My very mind was torn apart in confusion,
And all coherence was lost from this lad, parting.

Within the river's chaos, I gained an eyelet,
And crawled there onto shore with such glad parting.

When finally I fashioned for myself a home,
I was compelled to leave my own pad, parting.

No home, no refuge and no dream of peace,
Again Zahhar is a lonesome nomad, parting.

Flotsam – (ghazal #82)

Lost in a deep and hopeless haze wandering,
You walk an endless asphalt maze, wandering.

Demons swarmed and seized the City of Angels;
You fled their plague to spend your days wandering.

There is no way to raze the living dead
Who drift wherever darkness plays wandering.

You run from creatures foul that hunt your soul,
And stride the voiceless, barren ways wandering.

Alone and starving on the paths of men,
You stumble beneath a pallid gaze wandering.

Alert you shiver through the frozen nights,
Then stagger beneath a beating blaze wandering.

In leaning grasses, desert sands or snowdrifts,
Only a fretful slumber lays wandering.

You dare not close your eyes for sleep until
A star streaks in the sable phase, wandering.

Pelted in turn by hailstones, rains and snows,
No wonder assurance often strays wandering.

How often you have reified the scene—
Lone figure in the sunset rays wandering.

What do you seek Zahhar? Is it forgiveness?
Or, just another hope that stays wandering?

Afloat – (ghazal #93)

From stormy seas I sought some cove afar,
But only found broad cliffs that hove afar.

Returned to tossing seas with hopeless heart,
I lost all sight of land to rove afar.

Skies clear, and round about me lights a flock;
Hapless, I drift with this lost drove afar.

These fretful seabirds flee to heaven's height,
Faint fading in the sunset's mauve afar.

On sounds of lapping waters, night sets in;
Stars gleam from heaven's distant trove afar.

I have forgotten where all this began;
What spawned this pattern endless wove afar?

It matters not, Zahhar, the waters flow,
Your self was lost in that dim grove afar.

Deviation – (ghazal #88)

Awake, pinned wingless to an inured land;
I soar in sleep above this ordured land.

Endless I strive to shun these binding dreams,
Yet here I am still in this conjured land.

Gates should bar this twisted broken road,
Marking this dangerous path as detoured land.

I long to vanish like the drifting clouds
So often spanning cross a contoured land.

Sages have told me, “Be still and let go,
Leave the gray prison of your immured land.

“Stop trying to see the lost cause, Zahhar,
That brought into being this obscured land.”

Confinement – (ghazal #89)

Who allows deceit to convoy the mind
Will know of its power to destroy the mind.

Dull faces gaze into flickering screens
Where images senseless decoy the mind.

Meaningless dramas unfold in a box—
Not a thing granted to employ the mind.

Empty words broadcast misinformation,
With certitudes blent to alloy the mind.

Vices reflect from the soul's dark windows,
Till even these cease to annoy the mind.

When all that's left is reptilian thought,
Can one ever truly enjoy the mind?

Turn away, Zahhar, from those immured views,
It's no place for one to deploy the mind.

Tillage – (ghazal #78)

Where your words drift like drizzle down to bead me
I stumble through the vacant ways you lead me.

Each night beneath the shifting gaze of your eye
I listen for your silent words that feed me.

How can this clay begin to know its aspect
If your caress will never cease to knead me.

I am for you to harrow or abandon;
But, know my heart longs for your hands to weed me.

I never learned to fence with their ensate words,
And so I feared that their misuse would bleed me.

In the desert sways a lone rose on the wind;
Each day it asks the sky, "why did you seed me?"

"Why torment me," one day I asked, "with your song?"
"Zahhar", I heard, "deep in your heart you heed me."

Ponderment

The overall mood these five ghazals seems to be one of pondering, an emotional and mental weighing and assessment of various aspects of this reality.

Cost – (ghazal #90)

Bold lightning flashes clearly show the rage of gain;
The struck tree burnt to cinders shows the wage of gain.

Smug and pompous faces crown the masters of profit;
Yet, sorrows crease the face on every sage of gain.

The tycoon, priest and layman share a common bond,
Gilded bars are gripped within a cage of gain.

To fill all empty spaces is an endless task;
There is no way to ever take the gauge of gain.

In some lands bodies swell with greed until they burst,
Yet elsewhere children starve despite this age of gain.

This lifelong effort spent to fill the void within
Ends in a feast for worms—the final stage of gain.

How did the soul of Zahhar become deformed and scarred?
He, too, was once infected by the phage of gain.

Insanity – (ghazal #84)

Watch the faces of those with one reality;
Their dim eyes wall them in their won reality.

Crowding together in a daily frantic race—
This condition threatens to stun reality.

Not even vultures who dangle phantom carrots
Command enough control to run reality.

What does the man yells at walls have to teach?
It seems he has already done reality.

Ask the muttering woman carting the bags,
Was she freed when she learned to shun reality?

Don't ask why Zahhar has walked away from the world;
First, free yourself from this mad-spun reality.

Omnivorance – (ghazal #85)

Do you ponder the lack of fairies in this land?
They are gone, for there are no more trees in this land.

Spirits of elder trees manifest such creatures,
But now grazers and grain replace these in this land.

Make more trinkets, distracting toys and emissions;
All life is given to industries in this land.

More houses and cars and well-paying empty jobs—
Just vain and meaningless victories in this land.

Over six billion consumptive human beings
Yield in mindless expanse more babies in this land.

Ever increasing collapse of diversity—
And wonder the increase of disease in this land.

A golden age could manifest again, perhaps,
In the wake of purging tragedies in this land.

How can Zahhar live amid this ruthless carnage,
The fatal outcome of seeking ease in this land?

Stillness – (ghazal #79)

Summer fades into the nighttime's moderate return;
Torrid days now trade with autumn's temperate return.

With day's decline, the gentle stars renew their brilliance;
This new rebirth of night is still my favorite return.

Each year I lose the long-lived haven of the night;
What joy when such things lost and preterit return!

Soon the moon shall rise and set within the night;
How long I've longed to see her regenerate return!

The undulating cricket song lifts up my heart;
They, too, have pined for heaven's separate return.

Will you gaze with such a fondness of the night, Zahhar,
Upon your own dear night's commensurate return?

Raven – (ghazal #80)

How did you catch the night in your fluttering forms?
What speaks your rough voices from those uttering forms?

How is it you are gifted with the joy of flight
While we scabble wingless in our puttering forms?

Why did I dream I flew with my own black pinions,
Only to wake again amid sputtering forms?

Which of you will carry my soul to the heavens
When finally I break free from these scuttering forms?

Light's total absorption leaves no trace of color;
Are you creatures of light in those cluttering forms?

Is your call so abrupt because you speak the truth,
As opposed to the sound of dove's cattering forms?

Stop asking them to reveal what they know, Zahhar;
For, how will you make sense of their muttering forms?

Calling

For me, these six ghazals undoubtedly carry a sense of calling. Not just of calling, but remembrance.

Structured poetry called to me from the first days of my being able to read. Now that I am intensively studying verse-form and prosody, this calling is beginning to take shape. It is clear to me that poetry is the course my life has taken. When I look off into that sense of future, this course seems to continue on to the horizon.

Inanity – (ghazal #100)

These years advance, each day to greet this century,
And sorrows grow in fields of wheat this century.

These placid fields feed a people just as placid
Where trapped men hope to rise elite this century.

Harvest machines each sport a corporate logo;
Bounties despite, there few are replete this century.

Thick proteins feed the din of factory cities
Where prophets spawn to spread deceit this century.

False prophets toss their images in a salad;
Such empty words can hold no seat this century.

Loose image is displaced and destroyed by structure;
Tossed images will fade effete this century.

False idols fall to the principles of form;
How can their dust hope to entreat this century?

Rave against me with hollow and broken words;
Weak structure falls in dire defeat this century.

Embellished words—just a child's plastic plaything;
This passing fad will not compete this century.

Have peace, Zahhar, for this is your hundredth ghazal;
Who would have thought you would complete this century?

Design – (ghazal #51)

Each rendering shines forth a beaming masterpiece,
For form is in itself a gleaming masterpiece.

When does a leaf or petal burgeon out of joint?
Never, for each comes forth a seeming masterpiece.

This crazed soul that shattered like a fallen crystal,
Has been restored into this dreaming masterpiece.

Clouds ever refolding dance aloft on the wind,
Each new pattern another streaming masterpiece.

What are the chances there are no mistakes, Zahhar,
That joy and pain comprise a teeming masterpiece?

Puzzle – (ghazal #86)

Like a sea beacon who's blinking repeats,
Life's endless heaving and sinking repeats.

One set of symbols sought always again,
Peculiar the way one's thinking repeats.

The sun told the moon, "Your center is lost,
Look how your growing and shrinking repeats."

A sapling pinyon once asked its elder,
"How is it each year our drinking repeats?"

"Such enigmas are a gift," said the elder,
"We are blessed by nature's linking repeats."

Why are you puzzled by your fate, Zahhar?
Each time you arrive, your inking repeats.

Closure

This concludes Volume III of this series. There will be at least one more volume to come. My goal was to write my hundredth ghazal before putting this chapbook together. In fact, I committed to writing one hundred ghazals in September of 2001. Had I known at the time that it would take me nearly a year and a half to write one hundred English ghazals, I might not have taken on such an undertaking. Never in my life have I tackled a project of this magnitude and finished it.

Now that I have completed my hundredth ghazal, I will be taking some liberties as I approach the next milestone of 125 ghazals. One liberty I plan on taking has to do with an idea around rotating a portion of the refrain, or *radiff*. The rhyme scheme and the refrain will still be present, but there will be a new dimension added.

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
