

# What is a Ghazal pronounced Guzzel?

**Part 1 of Lesson Plan** by Kathleen Shull as part of a fulfillment for the Fulbright Hays Teacher Trip to Jordan.

## Introduction:

The ghazal is an unfamiliar poetic form in the Western world but due to increased international travel and exposure to other cultures including Middle Eastern, it is gaining adherents. The ghazal poem reflects the shifting mood, perspective and voice that mirrors internal thoughts. It's a combination of emotions in flux as humans move from thought to thought, making connections, often mimicking the internal monologue that humans have as he or she considers the world and his or her place in it with a unifying word and / or motif to move from couplet to couplet as if one were hopping from one tile to another while trying to keep one's balance.

This poetic form is said to replicate the pattern found in Quranic spiritual poetry that moves from the initial human understanding contrasted with dialectic spiritual intelligence as the writer progresses with often increasing complexity thinking through the ideas considered, savored, articulated, and elucidated. Spiritual love unlike human love is often without attachments and free of expectations.

The ghazal is from the qasida but called the ghazal which derives from an Arabic word meaning lovers' exchanges and is most similar to the European sonnet in intention. Ghazals often have eight to fourteen lines (sonnets have 14) and the last couplet contains the poet's name (the last couplet in a sonnet has the volta or the epiphany or nugget of the sonnet's meaning).

Hafiz, a 14<sup>th</sup> century genius of the ghazal poet, often ended his couplets with a final, often ironic or multi-leveled response to his earlier couplets in the poem. The shifts are where the poet's inquiry moves forward with an investigation, which examines, assesses, and revolves around until it finally dialectically comes to a satisfying conclusion by examining all the possible points-of-view on a thematic word. These movements can also include syllabic constraints that provide rhythm in addition to the word repetition in the final word of the second line of each couplet. It almost seems like a three-dimensional construction of progressive ideas in lines paired in couplets that can stand alone, but they are combined with succeeding couplets as sort of stepping from one idea to the other which are tied together or unified through a single repeated word and accompanying image.

The couplets may appear unconnected even disconnected because of being able to stand alone, yet the ideas explored can turn and twist like one is walking through a maze in an ancient city. But successful ghazals will illuminate connections within the final couplet when it all comes together as a whole to a crescendo or reach an epiphany or ah ha moment often audibly appreciated by the audience listening to the ghazals because they are performative. The audience rewards and values the ingenuity of the poet's use of ideas, words, rhythms and connections. Not unlike a modern audience who may gasp or becomes exhilarated by a performer's song's expression, vocalizations, lyrics combined with the instrumentals and style. The audience involvement responding to the poet is part of the ghazal's appeal, as entertainment which

satisfies both low and high brow aesthetic experiences in a group setting. The ghazal combines the earthly with the divine which is an ambiguous balancing act. Though contemporary concerts or hip hop artists come to mind, there seems to be an intellectual component in ghazal poetry that satisfies and that tops it off like Moth storytelling events in urban centers.

The poetry also contains drama at its core that resembles the deep longings experienced in life and can resemble a wounded animal in pain as it longs for its release which creates tension as it seeks and reaches a cathartic release. In this case the poem, is often thematically about unrequited love whether it is directed towards the love of God or carnal love which gives it an added dimension of intensity of feeling and poignancy.

The ghazal poet enhances his or her poetry with many rhetorical devices such as paradoxes, puns, word puzzles, ironies, etc. which are particular to each language it is spoken in. Ghazals are not always easy to translate because of these devices which may have syllabic or rhythm constraints as well. Ghazals are extremely popular in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. They are sometimes sung and accompanied by music, particularly stringed instruments and drums.

The ghazal animal makes a sound that is the mourn and cry of a wounded animal which is said to have given this form of poem its name. Often, ghazals are about love and reveal the pain of unrequited and unreturned love or longing.

Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe introduced the poetry of Hafiz to Western Europeans in his final book which was a translation into German when he was 65 entitled West-Eastern Divan published in 1819 after five years of work on the book. Some of the poems were famously set to music by Franz Schubert, Robert Schuman, and Felix Mendelssohn. Schubert set the poem “West Wind” to music and called it D 717 “Suleika II.” This lied or song is of unrequited love. In this late phase of Romanticism, it appears European writers such as Goethe turned Eastward after having plumbed the Italian and Greek eras and a wave of fascination with Orientalism swept through their ranks. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, painters such as Paul Klee, Swiss but who lived in Germany for long periods was exposed to exhibits about Middle Eastern art and artifacts and Goethe’s book for which he drew a gouache, watercolor, and ink drawing (see the lesson plan).

[optional sound and sight of gazelle to set the stage]

The Arabian Gazelle is vulnerable and endangered, while its relative the Saudi Gazelle has already become extinct in 1970. The sound of an African Gazelle is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g695LPTWbNY> “Gazelle Sound Effect” and an optional video of about 30 seconds of a gazelle at a water hole who escapes a lion attack

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaaK36mX\\_Pk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaaK36mX_Pk) “Lion fails to catch gazelle”



The Arabian Sand Ghazal, a type of antelope, is native to the Syrian and Arabian deserts and found from Jordan to Southeastern Turkey.



Agha Shahid Ali, an American ghazal poet originally from South Asia who lived mainly in Utah helped to popularize the poetic form in the United States and who defined ghazals as, “Lyric poems comprising thematically autonomous couplets united by strict schemes of rhyme and meter.”

### Etymology and pronunciation:

The ghazal wiki page attributes the ghazal origination to:

“The word *ghazal* originates from the Arabic word غزل (*ghazal*). The root syllables Gh-Z-L have three possible meanings in Arabic:<sup>[7]</sup>

1. غَزَلَ (*ghazal*) or غَزَلَ (*ghazila*) - To sweet-talk, to flirt, to display amorous gestures.<sup>[8]</sup>
2. غزال (*ghazaal*) - A young, graceful doe<sup>[9]</sup> (this is the root of the English word *gazelle*).
3. غَزَلَ (*ghazala*) - to spin (thread or yarn).<sup>[8]</sup>

The poetic form derives its name from the first and the second etymological roots, One particular translation posits a meaning of *ghazal* as 'the wail of a wounded deer',<sup>[10]</sup> which potentially provides context to the theme of unrequited love common to many ghazals.

The [Arabic](#) word غزل *ghazal* is pronounced [*ˈɣazal*], roughly like the English word *guzzle*, but with the *g* pronounced without a complete closure between the tongue and the [soft palate](#)<sup>[unreliable source?]</sup>. In English, the word is pronounced [*ˈqʌzəl*]<sup>[11]</sup> or [*ˈqæzæl*].<sup>[12]</sup>“ ( from “Ghazal” wiki at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghazal>)

**Qualities and attributes of the ghazal structure and form: [Students take notes or supply a close text as a graphic organizer; the red words could be made into blanks on a worksheet]**

-Ghazals usually comprise from four or five to as many as 15 **couplets** (two lines with connected meaning) and could number 50 or more [so, like the renga or linked poem in Japan uses the haiku form. Each new person adds a new haiku (5-7-5 syllable poem) or couplets to deepen the meaning and is like a sort of party game; a 700-year-old tradition as well but popularized by Basho].

-The first couplet establishes a pattern with a **refrain** at the end of both lines

-Each consecutive couplets' second line ends with the same refrain (repeated word)

-But each couplet can stand alone as a unified **strand of meaning**, and each added couplet adds a new strand of meaning often complicating and layering meaning.

-Generally, the couplets should be **syllabically consistent**, so have the same number of beats to add a rhythm section to the meaning conveyed

-Ghazal writers often **include their name in the final couplet** (perhaps to remind the reader/listener of the poet's name and help to immortalize his/her name(s)).



-Ghazals originated and are found in **Arabic** but found in both early Arab and Persian texts and seeded culturally to Sufi, Sanskrit, Hindu, and most Muslim areas of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Immigration has spread the form around the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

-There are **recurring motifs** and **images** that are thematically handled in ghazals including:

-The beloved as a **metaphor** which can be to god, a lover, or homeland and nationalistic or clan feelings.

-A singing bird (i.e. nightingale) that professes **longing**, desire for freedom, and its captivity.

-Garden **motifs** are common and **symbolize** paradise and an ideal state of being. The striving for the state of happiness with the loved one whether God or carnal lover.

-Roses, as the flower **representing** love and the scents often representing the presence of ethereal or heavenly feelings or persons (in the West, often associated with Mary)

-Goblet/wine which refer to intoxication, ecstasy, union with the divine, union with a lover (while in the state of intoxication) [Not sure how this seeps in as alcohol is supposedly illicit in Muslim cultures]

Often the ghazal's **meaning shifts** to create rhetorical devices such as **paradoxes** in which trite, overused images become fresh through new attributed meanings. In Western poetry images are considered cliché if repeated and avoided. But the word games that are peculiar to the language spoken in which the ghazal is written/spoken, create a much-loved entertainment that is often accompanied by stringed instruments and drums. The ghazal routinely may be sung. (often by well-known singers)

Though an **ambiguity** of meaning is strived for so that the listener / reader can interpret the ghazal, as often the topics, especially carnal love, illicit affection may be couched or hidden in its veiled meanings (particularly in modern versions).

Yet, **simplicity** and **juxtaposition** are valued and emphasized to carry and help give weight and definition to emotional impulses and ideas in the words.

Often, **tension** is built through surprises in the lines, so by the time a listener/reader reaches its refrain (repeated ending word), it causes a kind of catharsis and reaction in the audience like clapping or oohing and aahing in which audiences' responses at the genial combination of words, meanings, subtleties achieved in each couplet. (This is particularly visible if one watches videos of audiences in living rooms or small clubs and how they react to the ghazals.)

Rhetorical device of **repetition** often used to convey a sense of longing (which the listener/reader often identifies with)

The **dissonance** even discontinuity between the couplets, and between stanzas contributes to the poem's tension because the listener/reader must actively engage in the words' meaning on several levels but the stanzas may speak to one another.

Often the ghazal will puzzle and **play** with a key word that is repeated, used in different ways but still rhythmically ending the second line of each couplet to add a further dimension to the poem.

Very often there is a sense of ecstasy and **catharsis** when the epiphany of the divine union is reached.

Modern ghazals may cover many modern topics and are often written by women as well as men.

### Ghazal history:

The form is 1400 years old and descends from pre-Islamic Arabia, and Persia.

“Some believe that the classical Persian ghazal evolved from the **nasib**, the brief and often erotic prologue to the Arabic **qasida**, a longer **ode** (praise poem) with a ghazal-like rhyme scheme composed on pangryic [Greek public oral / text to praise someone or something], didactic, elegiac (mourning poem), or religious subjects. Other believe the ghazal developed from early Iranian folk poetry, about which we know nothing. Others believe it to be a blending of indigenous Persian lyric with the moral formal structures and themes of earlier Arabic poetry” (Gray, 6)

Authors Rumi and Hafiz, both Persian poets, Amir Khusrau of Delhi, India, promoted this form of poetry especially in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Similarly, court poets in Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries often with the lyre and guitar, sang ballads, poetry but carnal love was more often its topic rather than religious ecstasy. Religious music such as hymns, chorales, carols, and church music generally seems to have remained in the realm of chapel and church, while domestic poems set to music seemed to diverge)

The ghazals were originally from courts such as the Mughals and other royal courts.

Ghazals paradoxically employ simple language that in the West might be mistaken for cliché but in the Eastern realms was used to carry the weight of emotion and signify meaning.

Ghazals in South Indian/Pakistan evolved into nationalistic poems especially during the time of Partition and whole books of resistance poems or anthems were penned.

In addition, there was a concerted effort to use the poetic form for modern issues and not just for a form of entertainment or escapism but to carry messages about politics and nationalism and today it often is used to express human carnal love.

Ghazals are popular in Bollywood films and are found in Punjabi and Sindhi.

Today, ghazal poets often become lyricists in pop songs, films, as well as maintaining traditional classical ties to entertainment.

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Photo "Arabian gazelle"

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian\\_gazelle#/media/File:Arabian\\_Gazelle.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_gazelle#/media/File:Arabian_Gazelle.jpg) edited and updated 21 Nov. 2022.

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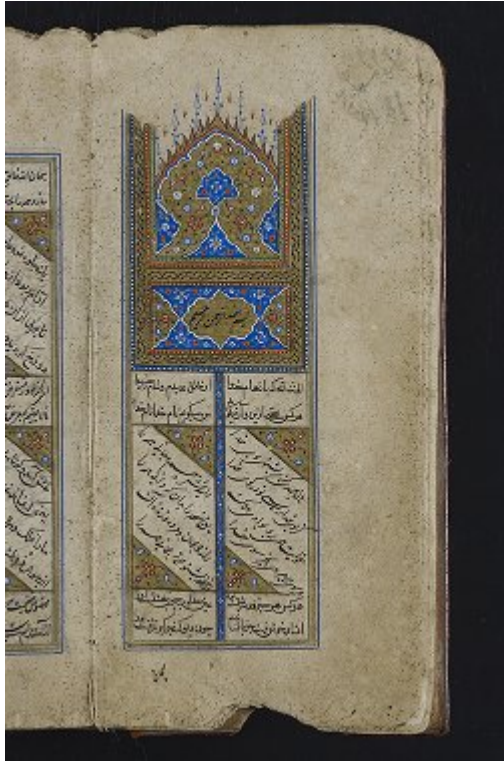
<https://www.thesongsofhafiz.com/hafizpoetry.htm> (accessed July 15, 2022)



Title page of the Panegyric of Leonardo Loredan (1503), created in honor of Leonardo Loredan, 75<sup>th</sup> Doge of Venice, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland.

([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c0/Panegyric\\_of\\_Leonardo\\_Loredan.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c0/Panegyric_of_Leonardo_Loredan.jpg))





An illustrated headpiece from a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century collection of ghazals and Rubaiyat (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghazal#/media/File:Ljs44.jpg>) in the Rare Books & Manuscript Library Collection at University of Pennsylvania LJSS 44 – (<http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/pageturn.html?>)

## Ghazal Examples:

### Modern:

#### Joy of Dance

#### “Hip-Hop Ghazal” by Patricia Smith

Gotta love us brown girls, munching on fat, swinging blue **hips**,  
decked out in shells and splashes, Lawdie, bringing them woo **hips**.

As the jukebox teases, watch my sistas throat the heartbreak,  
inhaling bassline, cracking backbone and singing thru **hips**.

Like something boneless, we glide silent, seeping 'tween floorboards,  
wrapping around the hims, and *ooh wee*, clinging like glue **hips**.

Engines grinding, rotating, smokin', gotta pull back some.  
Natural minds are lost at the mere sight of ringing true **hips**.

Gotta love us girls, just struttin' down Manhattan streets  
killing the menfolk with a dose of that stinging view. **Hips**.

Crying 'bout getting old—Patricia, you need to get up off  
what God gave you. Say a prayer and start slinging. Cue **hips**.

Source: Poetry (July/August 2007)

## 12<sup>th</sup> grade ELA student sample:

“Absence” by Lance Cruz

I often awaken in cold sweats searching for you, in your **absence**.  
Bruising the cold pillow to the great walls. Emptiness bore, **absence**

Mind is now a bad habit to caravan fast towards remorse  
The only night route I know by heart in morning is of your **absence**.

But, this journey is always guided north by that auspicious  
moon which, the sun lights giving, without wanting, even in its **absence**.

What is this? That even in solitude there is still hope, Lance  
But even the earth conspires you to heal, in her **absence**.

## About a massage:

“On the Table” by Maxine Kumin published in the *New Yorker* magazine.

*I was taught to smooth the aura at the **end**,*  
said my masseuse, hands hovering at the **end**.

Inches above my placid pummeled self  
did I feel something floating at the **end**?

Or is my naked body merely prone  
to ectoplasmic vapors to no **end**?

Many other arthritics have lain here  
seeking to roll pain’s boulder end on **end**.

Herbal oils, a CD playing soft  
loon calls, wave laps, bird trills now must **end**.

I rise and dress, restored to lift and bend,  
my ethereal wisp invisible at the **end**.

**“Red Ghazal” by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (Poetry Foundation)**

[poet finds an interesting way to obtain the sound with the word *red* in words that contain the sounds]

I’ve noticed after a few sips of tea, the tips of her tongue, thin and **red**  
With heat, quickens when she describes her cuts and bruises—deep violets and **red**.

The little girl I baby-sit, hair orange and wild, sits splayed and upside down  
on a couch, insists her giant book of dinosaurs is the only one she’ll ever **read**.

The night before I left him, I could not sleep, my eyes fixed on the freckles  
of his shoulder, the glow of the clock, my chest heavy with **dread**.

Scientists say they’ll force a rabbit to a bird, a jellyfish with a snake,  
even though the pairs clearly do not mix. Some things are not meant to be **bred**.

I almost forgot the weight of a man sitting beside me in bed sheets crumpled  
around our waists, both of us with magazines, laughing at the thing he just **read**.

He was so charming—pointed out planets, ghost galaxies, an ellipsis  
of ants on the wall. And when he kissed me goodnight, my neck **reddened**.

I’m terrible at cards. Friends huddle in for Euchre, Hearts—beg me to play  
With them. When it’s obvious I can clearly win with a black card, I select a **red**.

I throw away my half-finished letters to him in my tiny pink wastebasket, but  
my aim is no good. The floor is scattered with fire hazards, declarations **unread**.

**Adrienne Rich in this contemporary ghazal uses the image of water of which she identifies herself:**

The **dew** is beaded like mercury on the coarsened grass,  
the web of the spider is heavy as if with **sweat**.

An Ashanti woman tilts the flattened **basin** on her head  
to let the **water** slide downward: I am the woman and that **water**.

Rich uses the quality or attribute of dissonance or disassociation but still **unifies** the couplets with the connections between water images (dew, water, sweat, basin) from



from Adrienne Rich's *Ghazals and the Persian Poetic Tradition: A Study of Ambiguity and the Quest for a Common Language*.

“Ghazal for the Lost” by Faisal Mohyuddin who teaches English at Highland Park High School in Illinois and advises Narrative 4 in Chicago Pakistani-American who shared the poem with participants who attended a Ghazal workshop at a British Library workshop in 2022 I attended.



one of the unspeaking souls on this morning train knows where we are going.  
Waking again to a washed-clean darkness, we prefer the frightening disquiet of **mystery**.

To bear witness to the disappearing bravery of the night's last remaining star  
Is to walk alone through the hills without water, is to fill your mouth with **mystery**.

Inside each bird in the taxidermist's house, hidden between folds of crumpled paper —  
The photograph of a child, bright eyes of a surrogate heart, their youthful **mystery**.

Why must every breath come at a cost? Each passing minute steal from us the color  
And strength of our bodies? To live is to be a dying thing, all else is **mystery**.

Prayer directs our longing toward Mecca, keeps our foreheads anchored to the earth.  
Each step is touched by language, but between prostrations: silence, and **mystery**.

When the rain begins to fall, sending shivers of joy through the dead desert air,  
A sleeping dog lifts his head from the sand, watches the washing away of **mystery**.

As you arrive at your final destination, a village carved from a mountain's hip,  
A castle at its center, drop your body, begin to climb, be no longer afraid of **mystery**.

Do you remember, Faisal, what the elders preached about forgetting? Centuries of grief  
Had made them wise, taught them to seek the mercy and goodness of **mystery**.

**“From Lane to Lane Spread the Rumor of Familiarity”**

By Parveen Shakir (translated from Urdu by Waqas Khwaja)

From lane to lane spread the rumor of familiarity—  
He greeted me like fragrance in the air.

How can I say he has abandoned me?  
It is true, but it is a matter of embarrassment.

Whenever he went, returning, he came to me:  
This is the only good thing in my inconstant lover.

Your embrace, like your heart, may be forever inhabited,  
You may never face the desolation of a lonely night.

When he placed his hand on my burning forehead,  
The effect of healing spread to the very soul.

Even now, in monsoon nights, my body hurts  
And wondrous desires to stretch and yawn awaken within it.

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And wondrous desires to stretch and yawn awaken within it.

“Aaye Kuch Abr Kuch Sharaab Aaye” (by Urdu writer Faiz)

Aaye kuch abr kuch sharaab aaye

Uske baad aaye jo azaab aaye

Baam-e-Minaa se maahtaab utare

Dast-e-saaqi mein aaftaab aaye

Har rag-e-khoon mein phir charaagaan ho

Saamne phir woh benaqaab aaye

Umr ke har waraq pe dil ko nazar

Teri mehr-o-wafaa ke baab aaye

Kar rahaa tha gham-e-jahaan ka hisaab

Aaj tum yaad behisaab aaye

Na gayee tere gham ki sardaari

Dil mein yunh roz inqalaab aaye

Jal uthe bazm-e-ghair ke dar-o-baam

Jab bhi hum khaanaman kharaab aaye

Is taraah apni khaamoshi goonjee

Goya har simt se jawaab aaye

Faiz thi raah sarbasar manzil

Hum jahaan pahunche kaamyaaab aaye



\*\*\*

Let a few clouds, and a little wine **come**

Then let all the world's calamities **come**

From the roof of the world flows moonlight

From the hand of my beloved sunshine **comes**

In every jaded vein let there be fire

Before me again, unveiled, she **comes**

To every leaf of this age the heart is witness

Like doors your faith and kindness **come**

The world tormented me, I was counting the times

But today, unaccounted, the memory of you **comes**

The grief of you still holds me in thrall

But every day in my heart rebellion **comes**

Assemblies of rivals, their doors, their windows, go up in flames

Whenever my wasted, inebriated self **comes**

With such resonance did my silence ring out

From every empty corner my answers **come**

Faiz, there was the path, the prize was in reach

But wherever I came, there victory **comes**

“Uzr Aane Mein Bhi Hai” (by Daagh Dehlvi in Urdu)

Uzr aane mein bhi hai aur bulaate bhi nahin

Baa’is-e-tark-e-mulaaqaat bataate bhi nahin

Khoob parda hai ke chilaman se lage baithe hain

Saaf chupte bhi nahi saamane aate bhi nahin

Ho chuka qata ta’lluq toh jafaayen kyon hon

Jinko matalab nahin rahataa hai woh sataate bhi nahin

Zist se tang ho ae Daag toh jeetey kyon hon

Jaan pyari bhi nahin jaan se jaate bhi nahin

\*\*\* in English:

You don’t want to come over, and you don’t call me over **either**

You don’t tell me why you’ve cut off our connection **either**

So much to hide when you’re sitting next to the curtain

You don’t hide yourself, but I can’t see you **either**

If the relationship has ended, why still this oppression?

Those who don’t care don’t bug you **either**

If you are tired of life, Daagh, then why continue to live?

You don’t love your life and you don’t leave it, **either**