The Riddle of the Thread: On Arabic ghazal

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Abstract: *Ghazal* is the Arabic word for "amatory verse", and in other languages of the Islamic world it designates a sonnet-like poetic form. The notion that the word stems from Arabic *ghazl* "spinning thread" is widely held, despite the absence of support for this in classical lexicography and poetry criticism. Comparison to Semitic cognates points to an alternative derivation of *ghazal* from a verb of speaking – specifically, speech that is ambiguous and suggestive – by way of attraction to the gazelle (Arabic *ghazāl*), an ancient Near Eastern idiom for the beloved. While ghazal poetry emerged in Western Arabia during the first century of Islam, the genesis of *ghazal* as a term of art predates the literary record, as may be appreciated in a poem by ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa (6th century CE) that has been called the earliest complete qaṣīda in Arabic manuscript tradition.

Keywords: Ghazal, *nasīb*, textiles, gazelles, Semitic languages, Arabic morphology, ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa

Introduction

It is said that the genre of poetry called *ghazal* takes its name from *ghazala yaghzilu*, the Arabic verb for spinning, whose infinitive verbal noun *ghazl* also means "thread". Intuitively, the etymology has much to recommend it, as textile craft is a near-universal figure for poetic craft, and in Islamic literature this a dominant trope. "Just as the spinner plies her spindle to turn cotton and other fibers into thread, so does the poet ply the spindle of his art to win a woman and inspire her passion", said the late poet-critic Karim Merzah al-Asadi, uncontroversially.[1] Meanwhile, in early Arabic literary criticism, no acknowledgement of this metaphor can be been shown. Nor is it indicated by Arabic lexicographers, for all the energy these scholars put into word

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1   *Fa-kullamā tadīru l-ghāzila mighzalahā li-taghzila bi-hi l-quṭn wa-naḥwahu, ka-dhālika yadīru l-shāʿir mighzal fannihi li-stimālihi l-marʾa wa-stihwāʾihā* (Asadī 2014).

derivations. And yet the derivation of *ghazal* from spinning persists as a truism of literary history.

The reader would not be wrong to anticipate a stern and skeptical argument to follow an opening paragraph like that. What follows is the opposite: a speculative work of philological analysis in which play and frivolity are key concepts. My initial aim was to discover precisely how ghazal and spinning are related, and in this I was not successful. What I have uncovered instead are the word's affiliations with a Semitic verb of special speech.

"Affiliations", I am careful to say, and not "origin", because there is for *ghazal* no exact starting-point that can be indicated. The best that can be done is to locate it within a permutative network of cognates, attractions, and analogical templates. Perhaps it is fitting that the riddle posed by *ghazl/ghazal* has no linear solution. The thread followed here comes pre-enmeshed in a semantic and morphological web.

A typology of ghazal lies outside the scope of this article, which has hardly any ghazal poetry in it: nothing by ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿa (d. 93 A.H./712 CE, or 103/721) and his urban cohort of Mecca and Medina, and just two verses attributed to Jamīl ibn Maʿmar (d. 82/701), the foremost representative of the "ʿUdhrī school" of Bedouin ghazal poets. The answer to the riddle posed here is not to be found in ghazal poetry, and yet I dare hope it will contribute to a clearer understanding of ghazal within the matrix of early Arabic verse.

My findings are at odds with the middle position staked by the editors of *Ghazal as World Literature* (2005–2006) as to whether Arabic ghazal might be defined in terms of form or content. Given the global reach of that two-volume collection of articles (which run from the pre-Islamic period to the subsequent development of ghazal as a poetic form in Persian, its absorption into every language of the Muslim East, and its post-Goethean adaptations by Western poets) this was a sensible position to take. The longitudinal purview of *Ghazal as World Literature* was not the place or time for reductive typologies, and perhaps that is what led the editors to exclude the hylomorphic question so forcefully.[2] Whatever the case, I am forced to disagree with their judgment that the phenomenon of ghazal cannot be understood until questions of form and content are set aside. The findings of the present article are that Arabic ghazal was named for its amatory content, and that poetic form had nothing to do with it.

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[2]   "The question as to whether the ghazal should be defined through its content or its form can never be answered unambiguously, not even for any manifestation in any given individual language. Claims that the Arabic ghazal should be defined through its content and the Persian through its form soon prove to be a dead end" (Bauer and Neuwirth 2005: 17).

Amatory themes

Etymology is not destiny, and the derivation of *ghazal* is not an essential deter-
minant of the Arabic genre, nor less its subsequent career in Persian and other
languages. Along with what scholars of Arabic poetry have to say about ghazal,
however, it is crucial to attend to things they do *not* say. One (already noted)
is that none of them remark on the word's near-homophony with *ghazl* "spin-
ning" or draw any connection between ghazal and the fiber arts. Another is
that early literary scholars do not discuss ghazal as a poetic form. Rather, they
treat it synonymously with *nasīb* "amatory prelude" and *tashbīb* "description of
a woman" (Gruendler 2005: 58n3), and these are not poetic forms either. The
category to which ghazal, *nasīb,* and *tashbīb* belong is *al-aghrāḍ* (sg. *al-gharaḍ*),
which are the "modes" or "themes" a poet takes up within a *qaṣīda* (poem) of
any length. Long qaṣīdas are multimodal, moving from *gharaḍ* to *gharaḍ*, often
stopping at three. The *aghrāḍ* are not distinguished by formal traits or dedi-
cated meters, and as such one might hesitate to call them "genres" of poetry,
even though this is a conventional translation of *al-aghrāḍ* (Schoeler 2010).

The classification of ghazal as we find it in Arabic source tradition makes
any claim of formal essence difficult to sustain, particularly where some critics
identify it with the experiential raw material of amatory poetry (Gruendler
2005: 58n4). Thus does Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. ca. 456/1063 or 463/1071)
distinguish *ghazal* from *taghazzul* (the verbal noun of *ghazila*'s derived V[th]
form):

> *Nasīb, taghazzul,* and *tashbīb* all have the same meaning. As for *ghazal*, it means
> to keep company with women, and to put on manners that are agreeable to
> them, and it does not belong among those [poetic themes] that I discuss here.
> Whoever equates *ghazal* with *taghazzul* is in error. Qudāma was clear and
> emphatic about this in his book *Naqd al-shiʿr* (Critique of Poetry).[3]

What Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar (d. 337/948) had to say about it is the following:

> *Nasīb* is description of the physical features and character traits of women, and
> the varying fortunes of [the poet's] passionate love for them. Some people may
> not realize that there is a difference between *nasīb* and *ghazal*. The difference

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3   *Wa-l-nasīb wa-l-taghazzul wa-l-tashbīb kulluhā bi-maʿnā wāḥid, wa-amā l-ghazal fa-huwa
ilf al-nisāʾ wa-l-takhalluq bi-mā yuwāfiquhunna wa-laysa mimmā dhakartuhu fī shayʾ, fa-man
jaʿalahu bi-maʿnā l-ghazal fa-qad akhṭāʾa wa-qad nabaha ʿalā dhālika Qudāma wa-awḍaḥahu
fī kitābihi Naqd al-shiʿr* (Ibn Rashīq 1981: II.117).

between them is that *ghazal* is the intention (*maʿnā*) that people have when infatuation moves them to address women in verse (*nasaba bi-hinna*). *Nasīb* is, as it were, the expression of *ghazal*, and *ghazal* is the thing itself (*al-maʿna nafsuhu*).[4]

For Qudāma's distinction between *nasīb* as poetic genre and *ghazal* as inner experience, we must consider a poem of some importance to the history of Arabic literature: a nineteen-verse *lāmiyya* (poem rhymed in the letter *lām*) by ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa (6th c. CE) that Gustave von Grunebaum believed to be the earliest complete qaṣīda in the literary record.[5] In its first verse, *ghazal* appears in the sense that Qudāma indicates: a subjective intention that grips the poet, and is the subject of the interrogative he directs to his own heart (first verse of a 19-verse qaṣīda, meter: *kāmil*):

> *Hal lā yuhayyiju shawqaka ṭ-ṭalalu*
> *am la yufarriṭu shaykhaka l-**ghazalu***[6]

Is your longing not stirred up by what remains here?
    Or has *ghazal* not let go of your old man?

As for lexicographers, if they do not enforce Qudāma's distinction between the experience of *ghazal* and its representation or enactment in verse, it is because they scarcely treat the word as a term of art. The first Arabic dictionary, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* of al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 175 A.H./791 CE) defines *ghazal* like this:

Ghazal is young men's discourse with girls. [The IIIrd-form verb *ghāzala* takes a direct object of the woman addressed, such that] *Ghālazahā* ("He engaged her in flirtatious conversation") is said, while [the Vth-form verb] *taghazzala* means to do this in a studied or affected manner.[7]

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[4]   *Inna l-nasīb dhikr khalq al-nisāʾ wa-akhlāqahunna wa-taṣarruf aḥwāl al-hawā bi-hi maʿahunna, wa-qad yadhhabu ʿalā qawm ayḍan mawḍiʿ al-farq bayna l-nasīb wa-l-ghazal, wa-l-farq baynahumā anna l-ghazal huwa l-maʿnā lladhī idhā ʿaqadahu l-insān fī l-ṣabwa ilā l-nisāʾ nasaba bi-hinna min ajlihi, fa-ka-anna l-nasīb dhikru l-ghazal wa-l-ghazal al-maʿnā nafsusu* (Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar n.d.: 134).

[5]   von Grunebaum 1939: 342; von Grunebaum 1944: 125.

[6]   Süleymaniye MS Fātiḥ 5303 fol. 57v1.

[7]   *Wa-l-ghazal ḥadīth al-fityān maʿa l-jawārī, yuqālu Ghāzalahā mughāzalatan, wa-l-taghazzul takalluf dhāka* (al-Khalīl 2003: III.279).

It is true that "an affected manner" (*takalluf*) of *ghazal* might imply a versified form of it. But this is not a necessary interpretation where *taghazzul* appears in a poem by Abū l-Najm al-ʿIjlī (d. 130/746 or 747) that Abū ʿUbayda (d. 209/824 or 825) called one of the three greatest works of *rajaz* ever composed (al-Iṣbahānī 2008: X.120).[8] It appears in the description of a solitary camel driver, and as context for the word *taghazzul* it was quoted by al-Azharī (d. 370/981) in *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, and nearly every lexicographer after him (verses 173–180 of a 208-verse *rajaz* poem):[9]

> *Nashshaṭahā dhu limmatin lam tughsali*
> *ṣulbu l-ʿaṣā jāfin ʿani **t-taghazzuli***
> *mukhtaliṭu l-mafriqi jashbu l-maʾkali*
> *illā mina l-qārishi wa-mumaḥḥali*
> *yaḥlifu bi-llāhi wa-in lam yusʾali*
> *mā dhāqa thuflan baʿda ʿāmin awwali*
> *yamurru bayna l-ghāniyāti l-juhhal*
> *ka-ṣ-ṣaqri yajfū ʿan ṭirādi d-dukhkhali*

> [The camels] were kept moving by a man of unwashed locks,
> ungentle with his rod, indifferent to *taghazzul,*
> his hair in knots down to the roots, and his mouth wide open
> when not slurping sour milk mixed with fresh.
> His oath is by God, though no one asked for it.
> Since infancy, he's tasted no cooked food.
> Where women are pretty and carefree, he passes through
> like a falcon that disdains to hunt the finch.[10]

Kinany (1950: 331–332) understands *taghazzul* in this poem as versification, remarking that "when one has no leisure, when one is absorbed in hard work, one is not much interested in ghazal". The remark is apt, for ghazal and labor are, as we shall see, fundamentally opposed. I see however no grounds for

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[8]   *Rajaz* is a poetic form distinct from qaṣīda poetry, with a double rhyme and metrical scheme all its own, for which see Frolov 1997 (= Frolov 2000: 135–188).

[9]   The verses are widely quoted, with numerous variants; the reading followed here is that of Maymanī 1937: 70 and Jamrān (Abū l-Najm 2006: 359–360).

[10]   With this last word, there is double entendre. *Dukhkhal* is defined as "A certain bird, of small size, dust-coloured... an intrusive bird, smaller than the sparrow", but the word is also an intensive form of *dakhīl,* meaning "a guest who enters among strangers" (viz. "a woman who mixes freely"). Lane 1863: III.860 (art √*dkhl*).

metapoetic interpretation, i.e., no reason to understand *taghazzul* in this context as "verse composition", rather than "the courtship of women", from which the herdsman is barred by his rural isolation and unkempt state.

In the view of lexicographers, *ghazal* was in the first place amatory speech, identified secondarily (if at all) with love poetry, as in *Tāj al-ʿarūs* (art. √*ghzl*) of al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790):[11]

> My teacher [Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Fāsī, d. 1170/1756] said: On its face, *ghazal* is repartee with women, but other meanings can be ascribed to it. Among litterateurs and scholars, it means to eulogize the visible share of the beloved's body, or to commemorate the days of togetherness and separation and other such things, and it shares these meanings with *nasīb*.

By these appearances, ghazal poetry was so called after the amatory speech that is its content. This makes *ghazal* different from other verse-type designations in a significant way: Geert Jan van Gelder notes that in Arabic, "terms for kinds of verse (*rajaz*, *ramal*, *hazaj*, *qiṭʿah*, *muwashshaḥ*, *zajal*, etc.) are more often derived from formal, prosodical features than from their functions".[12] And for early Arabic ghazal, there are no defining formal features that can be shown.

It is in fact ghazal's lack of a formally-defined role within the polythematic qaṣīda that distinguishes it from *nasīb*. Renate Jacobi, who has written more on *nasīb* and ghazal than any other Western scholar, indicates no generic distinction between them other than this: "[B]y *ghazal* is meant the free-standing love poem, and *nasīb* is for the first part of the qaṣīda".[13] To put this another way, *nasīb* carries with it the expectation of a transition to other themes (*aghrāḍ*) before the poem is through, whereas ghazal is charged with no such expectation. That does not make it rigorously monothematic, because ghazal can accommodate bouts of invective (*hijāʾ*), and elements of other themes. But

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[11]   *Qāla shaykhunā: Ẓāhiruhu anna l-ghazal huwa muḥādathat al-nisāʾ, wa-laʿallahu min maʿānihi, wa-l-maʿrūf ʿinda aʾimmat al-adab wa-ahl al-lisān anna l-ghazal wa-l-nasīb huwa madḥ al-aʿḍāʾ al-ẓāhira min al-maḥbūb aw dhikr ayyām al-waṣl wa-l-hajr aw naḥw dhālika* (al-Zabīdī 1965: XXX.91).

[12]   van Gelder 2012: 72n165. Of these, *muwashshaḥ* stands out, because it is plausibly named for a textile-adjacent craft: the tooling of the jeweled belt called *al-wishāḥ*, whose patterning is imagined in the alternating rhymes of *muwashshaḥ* form (Bush 2018: 182). *Nota bene* that *muwashshaḥ* was applied by the natural philosopher al-Kindī (d. 256/873) to a type of melodic progression before it is found to name a verse form; see Wright 2004: 360 and Wright 2006: 3.

[13]   [Ġ]azal *steht für das selbständige Liebesgedicht,* nasīb *für den ersten Teil der* qaṣīda (Jacobi 2016: 469n10, as in Jacobi 1985: 1n1).

while ghazal in the absence of other themes is still ghazal, the same is not true for *nasīb*. Amatory verse in which there is no transition to other *aghrāḍ* is one way to describe early ghazal. As simply as possible, this is stated by Muḥammad Mahdī al-Sharīf: "All *nasīb* is ghazal, but not all ghazal is *nasīb*".[14]

Spinning threads

What, then, of ghazal and spinning? The first thing to be said is that *ghazal*, *ghazl,* and their affiliated verbs are marked by differences of voweling that make it impossible to enlist them in puns (*jinās*) of the kind pointed out above in n10 (unless through the derivative IVth-form verb *aghzala*, which I have not found to happen). If any evidence could be found to align poetic composition with spinning in the early poetic record, it would certainly undercut the argument put forth here.[15] My findings are that in the 6th–8th centuries CE, *ghazal* and *ghazl* belonged to separate realms of experience and signified entirely different things.

The argument begins with a return to lexicography, specifically *Maqāyīs al-lugha* (Analogical Templates of Language) by Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004). His entry for √*ghzl* adds just one original observation to the judgments of lexicographers before him, which is the categorical exclusion of any relationship between *ghazl*, *ghazal*, and the juvenile ungulate called *ghazāl*:[16]

> The root √*ghzl* forms three distinct words with no analogy between them.
> (1) The first is *ghazl*, as in: "The woman spun her thread" (*Ghazalat al-marʾa ghazlahā*), and the piece of wood [around which the thread is wound] is the *mighzal*, pl. *maghāzil*.
> (2) The second word is *ghazal*, which is conversation of young men and women. *Ghazila l-kalb ghazalan* is said of a dog when it pursues the gazelle, but

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[14]   *Fa-inna kulla nasībin ghazalun wa-laysa kullu ghazalin nasīban* (Sharīf 2004: 113).

[15]   Prose reports of poets' "table talk" are another matter, as in *Muḥāḍarat al-udabāʾ* of al-Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī (d. ca. 502/1108), where Ḥamza ibn Bīḍ (or Abyaḍ) al-Ḥanafī says to Yazīd ibn al-Ḥakam (two minor poets of the early 2nd/8th c.): "My *ghazl* is the finest, my weave the closest, and my selvage the most exquisite" (*Innī la-adaqqu l-ghazl wa-aṣfā l-nasj wa-araqqu l-ḥāshiya*), al-Rāghib 1961: I.82. Here the metapoetics of spinning are determined by *nasj* "weave", whose identification with *shiʿr* "poetry" is undeniable (and the subject of a forthcoming study by the author). As for ghazal, I detect no reference to it in this report, where the joke seems to be on Ḥamza for his boast of mastery in low trades.

[16]   The full-grown gazelle is called in Arabic *ẓabī*, feminine *ẓabya*.

abandons the chase upon reaching it, and loses track of it (*wa-lahā ʿanhu*, lit. "is diverted from it").

(3) The third word, *ghazāl*, is the well-known [animal]; *ghazāla* is the feminine. The sun is called *al-Ghazāla* when it has just begun to rise, and perhaps this name is borrowed from the gazelle.[17]

It is hard to see how these could be construed as completely separate meanings, when the dog's failure to bring down the gazelle (2) obviously depends on the gazelle itself (3). There is in any case no verb dedicated to (3); the verbal paradigms of √*ghzl* are just these two:

(1) *ghazala yaghzilu ghazlan*
(2) *ghazila yaghzalu ghazalan*

The claim that amatory *ghazal* derives from the hunting dog's failure goes back to Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/846), as quoted in *Tahdhīb al-lugha*:

Abū l-ʿAbbās (Thaʿlab, d. 291/904) reported that Ibn al-Aʿrābī said: *Ghazal* is derived from *ghazalu l-kalbi*.[18] This is the behavior of a dog stalking a gazelle when the gazelle senses it, and freezes in terror, cleaving to the ground: the dog loses track of it (*fa-lahiya ʿanhu*), and turns away. "Your dog has failed, by God!" (*Ghazila wa-llāhi kalbuka*) is said [in this event]. The verb *ghazila* is also used of an idle good-for-nothing, and the epithet *ghazil* is applied to a man who keeps company with women, signifying his uselessness for anything else.[19]

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17   *Al-ghayn wa-l-zāʾ wa-l-lām thalāth kalimāt mutabāyināt lā tuqāsu minhā wāḥida bi-ukhrā. Fa-l-ūlā l-ghazl: yuqālu Ghazalat al-marʾa ghazlahā, wa-l-khashaba mighzal wa-l-jamʿ maghāzil. Wa-l-thāniya al-ghazal: wa-huwa hadīth al-fityān wa-l-fatayāt wa-yuqālu Ghazila l-kalb ghazalan, wa-huwa an yaṭlubu l-ghazāl ḥattā idhā adrakahu tarakahu wa-lahā ʿanhu. Wa-l-thālitha al-ghazāl: wa-huwa maʿrūf wa-l-unthā ghazālā, wa-laʿalla ism al-shams mustaʿār min hādhā fa-inna l-shams tusammā l-Ghazāla irftifāʿa l-ḍuḥā* (Ibn Fāris 1979: IV.422).

18   Thus in modern editions of *Tahdhīb al-lugha* (art. √*ghzl*), where editions of *Lisān al-ʿarab* (art. √*ghzl*) have *Ghazila l-kalbu*. The difference is one of syntax: *Ghazila l-kalbu* is a complete sentence in verb-subject order, while *ghazalu l-kalbi* ("the *ghazal* of the dog") is a genitive construction upon the verbal noun.

19   *Wa-rawā Abū l-ʿAbbās ʿan Ibn al-Aʿrābī qāla: Ukhidha l-ghazal min ghazali l-kalbi, wa-huwa an yuṭlaba l-ghazāla fa-idhā aḥassa bi-l-kalb khariqa, ay laṣiqa bi-l-arḍ fa-lahiya ʿanhu al-kalb wa-nṣarafa, fa-yuqālu: Ghazila wa-llāhi kalbuka, wa-kalbun ghazilun, wa-yuqālu li-l-ḍaʿīf al-fātir ʿalā shayʾ ghazilun, wa-minhu rajulun ghazilun li-ṣāḥib al-nisāʾ li-ḍuʿfihi ʿan ghayri dhālika* (al-Azharī 1964: VIII.49).

It is not necessary to accept this etymology as linguistic fact to appreciate that *ghazal* was coded as unproductive behavior, particularly where the verbs *lahā* and *lahiya* "to be diverted" are concerned. Their verbal noun, *lahw*, is "frivolity" itself, as heard in the Qurʾanic warning against the wages of mockery: "And whoever trades in frivolous discourse (*lahwa l-ḥadīthi*) in order to lead people away from the path of God, without knowledge, making mockery of it – for such as these will come humiliating punishment".[20] In early poetry, the pairing of *lahw* and *ghazal* is formulaic – whether in series, as in this tavern-scene by al-Aʿshā who was Muḥammad's contemporary (verse 43 of a 66-verse qaṣīda, meter: *basīṭ*):

> *Wa-mustajībin takhālu ṣ-ṣanja yasmaʿuhu*
>   *idhā turajjiʿu fī-hi l-qaynatu fuḍulu*
> *min kulli dhālika yawmun qad lahawtu bi-hi*
>   *wa-fī t-tajāribi ṭūlu **l-lahwi wa-l-ghazalu***[21]

> You'd think the cymbals on the fingers of the virtuosa singer
>   with the vibrato in her voice could hear the accompaniment [of the
>   stringed oud].
> That whole day I spent in fun diversion,
>   experiencing the full range of **merriment and *ghazal***.

or in genitive construction, like this bit of *fakhr* (self-praise) by Ḥujl al-Fazārī of unknown dates (lines 6–7 of a 9-line *rajaz* poem):

> *Qad labastu l-ʿaysha dhā ṣalāḥi*
> *alhū bi-**lahwi l-ghazali** l-mazzāḥi*[22]

> The life I wear is an honest life,
> indulging in **frivolity of** mirthful ***ghazal***.

Ghazal and *lahw* substitute for one another in a Prophetic hadith about marriage customs. It was told by Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687) that the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678) presented a female relative in marriage to a member

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[20] *Wa-mina n-nāsi man yashtarī lahwa l-ḥadīthi li-yuḍilla ʿan sabīli llāhi bi-ghayri ʿilmin wa-yattakhidhahā huzuwan ūlāʾika la-hum ʿadhābun muhīnun* (Q 31:6).

[21] al-Aʿshā 1983: 59.

[22] al-Āmidī 1961: 112.

of the Muslim community at Medina (the *Anṣār*). On learning of this, the Prophet asked whether there was a singer at the wedding. "No", said ʿĀʾisha. He replied: "The Anṣār are a people for whom ghazal is customary. I wish you had sent someone with the bride to say: *Ataynākum, ataynākum, fa-ḥayyānā wa-ḥayyākum* "We've come to you, we've come to you! / God give long life to us and you!"[23] The hadith attracts notice for Muḥammad's recitation of a festive song (meter: *wāfir*), and its apparent support for the permissibility of music; perhaps for this reason the hadith was graded *ḍaʿīf* (weak). In a canonical version of the same hadith, *lahw* changes places with *ghazal* where the Prophet says: "O ʿĀʾisha, was there merriment (*lahw*)? For the Anṣār love their merriment".[24]

Ghazal's association with leisure makes it an odd match for spinning, which is all virtue, industry, and "An Ample Wage" (*al-Ajr al-jazl*), to quote the title of a treatise on spinning by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).[25] The hadith he cites represent spinning as virtuous women's labor ("Tailoring is a job for pious men, and spinning is a job for pious women") and a surrogate for outdoor recreation: "Train your sons to swim and shoot a bow, and for the faithful woman in her house a spindle is excellent amusement (*lahw*)".[26] If the latter hadith plays on the *lahw* of ghazal, it is ironic play, as where the spindle is made out to be an ornament: "Adorn the gatherings of your womenfolk with the spindle".[27]

How, then, have modern scholars explained their derivation of *ghazal* from *ghazl*? The first to state it was Ignaz Goldziher, in a passing remark that folds it into the conventional analogy between poetry and weaving.[28] By Ḥassān Abū Riḥāb (1947: 7–8) the craft metaphor was fleshed out with reference to the rotation and twisting motion (*al-idāra wa-l-fatl*) of spindle and spinner, which he likens to the verbal machinations of a lover seeking to elicit an amorous

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[23] *Inna l-Anṣār qawm fī-him ghazal fa-law baʿathtum maʿahā man qāla: Ataynākum ataynākum fa-ḥayyānā wa-ḥayyākum* (Ibn Māja 1998: III.341–342).

[24] *Yā ʿĀʾishatu mā kāna maʿakum lahw fa-inna l-Anṣāra yuʿjibuhum al-lahw* (al-Bukhārī 2007: 1081).

[25] al-Suyūṭī 2003: 109–116; see also al-Suyūṭī 2000: 359.

[26] *ʿAmal al-abrār min al-rijāl al-khiyāṭa wa-ʿamal al-abrār min al-nisāʾ al-mighzal* (al-Suyūṭī 2003: 112); *ʿAllimū abnāʾakum al-sabāḥa wa-l-ramāya wa-niʿma lahw al-muʾmina fī baytihā l-mighzal* (al-Suyūṭī 2003: 111).

[27] *Zayyinū majālis nisāʾikum bi-l-mighzal* (al-Suyūṭī 2003: 113).

[28] *Einem verwandten Ideengang verdankt auch der Terminus* ghazala *(Ghazel, Liebesgedicht) seine Entstehung: von* ghazala, *spinnen* (Goldziher 1896: 134).

response – an artful solution with no evident parallel in classical poetry or language scholarship. The fullest statement of the case is Régis Blachère's (1965: II.1028):

> The semantic development of the word from the root *gh z l*, "to spin", "spinning", is not in doubt, but presupposes intermediary meanings for which we have no evidence; the *ghazal* was not in fact a song of women spinning, like that of which Tibullus speaks,[29] but a man's song addressed to a girl; contamination by the noun *ghazāl* "gazelle", from the images and comparisons associated with it, is not perhaps to be excluded (cf. "to make sheep's eyes").

To Blachère's credit, what this explanation lacks is candidly stated. What "intermediary meanings" could have bridged the gap between industrious *ghazl* and idle *ghazal*? In the eleventh chapter of his treatise on love, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) says that spinners and weavers are well suited for the role of go-between, because their professions bring them into contact with many people.[30] On another note, Elizabeth Wayland Barber (1994: 88) remarks that spinning is "an activity easily dropped and easily resumed in the excitement of courting". These are not shared meanings (what Ibn Fāris calls *qiyās* "analogy"[31]), but shared involvements – metonymies, in other words, and somewhat far-fetched at that. Of course word meanings can be connected through metonymy: *al-nīr* is both the "ornamental border" of a piece of cloth and the "heddle rod" of the loom where it was woven. With regard to *ghazal*, however, the amatory involvements of spinners are mentioned in none of the lexica, and seem less relevant to the matter than Ibn al-Aʿrābī's hunting dog.

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[29]   Albius Tibullus died the same year as Vergil (19 BCE). The reference is to the first poem in his second book of elegies, where it is not a spinner who sings but a weaver at her loom (II.1.65–66). The activity of spinners is described in two preceding lines: *hinc et femineus labor est, hinc pensa colusque / fusus et adposito pollice versat opus* "Here is women's labor, here the heavy distaff / and the spindle that turns out work at the press of a thumb" (Tibullus 1913: 136).

[30]   *Wa-akthar mā yastaʿmilu l-muḥibbūna fī irsālihim ilā man yuḥibbūnahu.... dhawāt ṣināʿa yuqarrabu bi-hā min al-ashkhāṣ fa-min al-nisāʾ ka-l-ṭabība... wa-l-ṣunnāʿ fī l-mighzal wa-l-nasīj wa-mā ashbaha dhālika* (Ibn Ḥazm 2000: 55).

[31]   Baalbaki 2014: 351.

Ambiguous speech

The solution I propose is not without precedent in Arabic language science. It begins by attending to the phenomenon called *qalb* (or *taqlīb*, or *taqallub*), which is the tendency of anagrammatic roots to signify similar things. Thus are words for "praise" derived from √*ḥmd* and √*mḥd*, "raise high" from √ *ʿrf* and √*rf ʿ*, "shield/screen" from √*str* and √*trs*, etc. I am careful to call this a tendency and not a principle, and stress that as a guide to word derivations, *qalb* is the furthest thing from foolproof. At best, it is an indicator of family relationships, as suggested in the arrangement of early dictionaries (including the above-cited *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* and *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, as well as *Jamharat al-lugha* of Ibn Durayd, d. 321/933), where every triliteral root is grouped together with its anagrams.[32] But the authors of these works do not indicate semantic connections between the roots they group together in this way (Anīs 2010: 55). Ibn Fāris does some of this in *Maqāyīs al-lugha*, and also in *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha*, where he points out that √*jdhb* and √*jbdh* are both used for the act of "pulling", and √*bkl* and √*lbk* for "mixing".[33] (Remarkably, this author's *Kitāb al-Thalātha*, which is dedicated to triliteral anagrams, draws no semantic connections among them.[34])

It was Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) who made the most of semantic relationships among anagrammatic roots, elevating them to a principle he called "the greater derivation" (*al-ishtiqāq al-akbar*), in distinction to the "major derivation" (*al-ishtiqāq al-kabīr*) of casual metatheses, and the "minor derivation" (*al-ishtiqāq al-ṣaghīr*) that is normative morphology (Baalbaki 2014: 234). Another premodern writer on the subject was Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), whose *Jinān al-jinās* (The Gardens of Paronomasia) begins with a chapter on anagrammatic roots (DeYoung 1992: 185). In the modern period, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1804–1887) published long lists of synonymous anagrams, distinguishing them critically from dialectical variants and faults of speech.[35] Seldom is this method of word derivation mentioned approvingly by

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[32]   The edition of *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* cited in this article was rearranged alphabetically for greater ease of use (al-Khalīl 2003: I.3–7).

[33]   Baalbaki 2014: 234, 351; Tlaymat 2015: 645–648; Ibn Fāris 1997: 153–154.

[34]   Ibn Fāris 1964.

[35]   Shidyāq 1880: 174–188. A more polymorphous approach to the phenomenon was taken by this author in *Sirr al-layāl fī al-qalb wa-al-ibdāl* (The Nights' Secrets on Anagrammatic Permutation and Metathesis), of which just one volume (comprising the consonants *bā ʾ* through *jīm,* and therefore excluding √*ghzl*) was published in 1866.

linguists, and while I do not champion it as the model for my work on *ghazal*, I grant that my argument is similarly speculative, and that some Arabists will reject it on these grounds. But even they will have to concede that whatever metonymy is imagined to explain *ghazal*'s derivation from *ghazl* – in absence of premodern testimony or any morphological parallel to back it up – is equally speculative.

There are two anagrams of √*ghzl* on which words are formed.[36] One is √*zghl,* whose IVth-form verb *azghala* means "to nurse" an infant. *Al-zaghlūl* (or *al-zughlul*) is a "nursling", while another derived noun, *zughla*, is for the "squirt" of milk from an udder, and a "torrent" of urine from a camel. What unites these derivatives is the shared meaning "to eject a stream", which is precisely the definition given for *zaghala* by Ibn Durayd.[37] This meaning is easy to connect with (1) *ghazala yaghzilu ghazlan*, which means to "to eject a thread" when said of a spider, and "to spin" one when said of the conversion of raw fibers into thread. Without awarding priority to either √*zghl* or √*ghzl*, I have confidence in the semantic relationship between these roots, even if no classical authority can be found to have pointed it out.

This brings us no closer to a derivation of *ghazal,* for between √*zghl* and (2) *ghazila yaghzalu ghazalan*, I detect no analogy, not even an obscene one.[38] But I do see one between *ghazal* and the other signifying anagram of √*ghzl*, which is √*lghz*. *Laghaza*, like *ghazila*, is a verb of special speech: its verbal noun *lughz* is a "riddle". Whether for enjoyment, deception, or both, it is evasive speech – equivocal speech, with more than one possible meaning. In the words of Ibn al-Aʿrābī, "*Lughz* is speech dressed up".[39] The literary phenomenon of *alghāz* "riddles" is well documented and needs no review here, for it is not as language art but "strategically ambiguous speech" that *lughz* relates to *ghazal* "flirtatious speech". In *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1233), there is a report that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (the second caliph

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[36]   A third, √*zlgh*, is adduced in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* (al-Khalīl 2003: II.190), but al-Azharī calls this a misreading (*taṣḥīf*) of √*zlʿ* (al-Azharī 1964: VIII.48–49). Between the characters for ʿ*ayn* and *ghayn,* the difference is one dot.

[37]   "One uses [I[st]-form] *zaghala* and [IVth-form] *azghala* for the action of pouring something out all at once" (*Zaghaltu al-shayʾ wa-azghaltuhu idhā ṣababtuhu dufʿatan*), Ibn Durayd 1987: II.819.

[38]   *Ghazal* and intercourse (*al-ghazal wa-n-nayk*) are conflated in an obscene *rajaz* poem from al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 255/868) *Kitāb al-Bighāl* (al-Jāḥiẓ 1964: II.318), and no doubt elsewhere. Albeit a natural pairing, it is undetectable in the semantic matrix of (2) *ghazila yaghzalu* as a verb of speech.

[39]   *Wa-l-lughz al-kalām al-mulabbas* (al-Azharī 1964: VIII.51).

of Islam) witnessed a transaction in which one ʿAlqama ibn al-Faghwāʾ[40] attempted to get the better of a Bedouin by means of "an oath of **ambiguous speech**, causing the Bedouin to think that he had pledged an oath to him" (**yulghizu** la-hu fī l-yamīn wa-yurā l-aʿrābī annahu qad ḥalafa la-hu). Indignant at this, ʿUmar said to ʿAlqama: "What **anfractuous** oath is this?" (Mā hādhihi l-yamīn **al-lughayzā**).[41]

As they do for *ghazal*, lexicographers trace the origin of *lughz* to the animal kingdom. The jerboa is a burrowing rodent that was proverbial for the twists and turns of its lair, as in *Tahdhīb al-lugha*:

> Al-Mundhirī (d. 329/939) reported to me that Abū l-Haytham (al-Rāzī, d. 276/889) said: *Lughz, laghz, lughaz, lughayzā* and *ilghāz* are for the jerboa's excavation of its underground burrow. [The IVth-form verb] *Alghaza l-yarbūʿ ilghāzan* "The jerboa digs a winding maze" is said because it digs a passageway in one direction, and then another in a different direction, and then a third and fourth, so that when a Bedouin tries to catch it with his stick, the jerboa runs out (*nafaqa*) by a different route.[42]

Most significant in this report is the use of *nafaqa* for the jerboa's escape, which is analogous to another kind of strategic ambiguity – the religious kind called *nifāq* "hypocrisy". *Nifāq* means to wriggle free from binding oaths, to profess one faith and then another, and to make a pact with no intention to uphold it. Although these too are speech acts, similar in their way to deceptive *lughz*, the conventional derivation of *nifāq* from *nafaq* (the jerboa's "escape route") makes good sense in light of the Aramaic cognate *npq* "to go out". (Payne Smith 1903: 345–346).

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[40] Where this report is quoted in *Lisān al-ʿarab* art. √*lghz*, the name appears as "ʿAlqama ibn al-Qaʿwāʾ"—another case of *taṣḥīf*, corrected by the editors of *al-Nihāya* (Ibn al-Athīr 1963: IV.256n2).

[41] Ibn al-Athīr 1963: IV.256.

[42] *Akhbaranī l-Mundhirī ʿan Abī l-Haytham annahu qāla: Al-lughz wa-l-laghz wa-l-lughaz wa-l-lughayzā wa-l-ilghāz ḥufra yaḥfiruhā al-yarbūʿ fī juḥrihi taḥta l-arḍ, yuqālu Alghaza l-yarbūʿ ilghāzan fa-yaḥfiru fī jānib minhu ṭarīqan wa-yaḥfiru fī l-jānib al-ākhar ṭarīqan wa-kadhālika fī l-jānib al-thālith wa-l-rābiʿ, fa-idhā ṭalabahu l-badawī bi-ʿaṣāhu min jānib nafaqa bi-l-jānib al-ākhar* (al-Azharī 1964: VIII.51).

For the predication of discursive *lughz* upon the *lughz* of the jerboa, I cannot say the same, because √*lghz* is fundamentally for acts of speech. This is shown by cognates in Aramaic (*lʕz*) and Hebrew (*lʕz*) that are likewise roots of words for "speech that is hard to understand". In the entry for *lʕz* in R. Payne Smith's *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, the affinities of √*lghz* are well evident: "[T]o make indistinct or soft sounds as birds, insects, serpents; to sing, chant, sound, give forth a sound of chants; sounds of lamentation; to lisp; to speak a foreign language; to whisper softly" (Payne Smith 1903: 244). There is an endearing *locus classicus* for the word in the 5th- or 6th-c. CE *Dispute of the Months* where Nisan (March-April) says: "[I]n me the swallows twitter, / **uttering** (*lā ʕzān*) sweet melodies in their nests", but the idea of "foreign language" comes much closer to Arabic *lughz*.[43] This is the meaning of Hebrew *loʕez* in the first verse of Psalm 114 (KJV): "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of **strange language**…". In the Hebrew Bible, this is the sole occurrence of the word, which came to name the medieval Judeo-Romance dialects (analogous to Yiddish) memorialized in the *Meʕam Loʕez* (1730) of Yaakov Culi.[44]
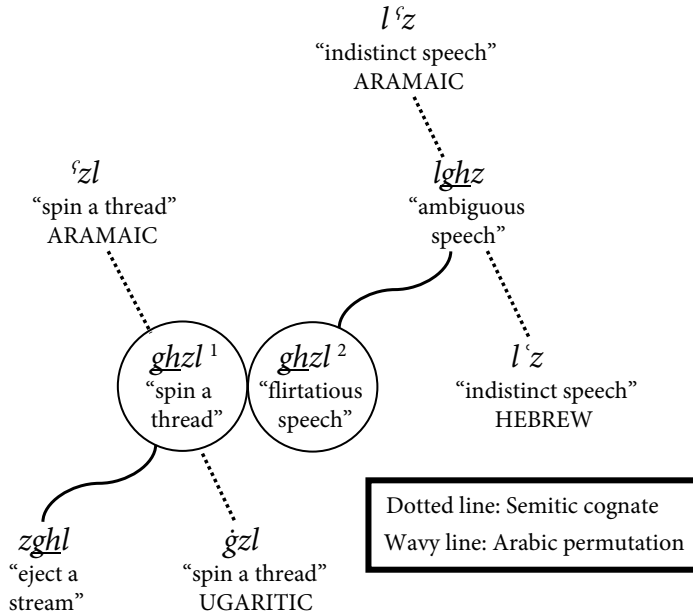
The Arabic root √*ghzl* has cognates too: Aramaic *ʕzl* and Ugaritic *ġzl* "to spin".[45] But cognates for √*ghzl* as a verb of speech cannot be found. I explain this by construing paradigms (1) and (2) of √*ghzl* as separate roots, which I now designate as √*ghzl*[1] and √*ghzl*[2]. The evident lack of Semitic cognates for √*ghzl*[2] – that is, the absence of cognates meaning "to speak", "sing", "love", "versify", or anything in common with Arabic *ghazal* – hints at its more recent provenance. As to where √*ghzl*[2] came from, I suggest that it was an anagrammatic permutation of Arabic √*lghz*, whose Aramaic and Hebrew cognates with similar meanings suggest it as the more archaic root.

The Semitic cognates and Arabic anagrams of √*ghzl*[1] and √*ghzl*[2] can be correlated in the following way:

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[43] Ed. and tr. Brock 1985:193–194.

[44] Weinreich 1956.

[45] Payne Smith 1903: 409; Waldman 1974: 125n2; Renfroe 1992: 113; del Olmo and Sanmartín 2015: 324.

lˤz
"indistinct speech"
ARAMAIC

ˤzl
"spin a thread"
ARAMAIC

lghz
"ambiguous
speech"

ghzl ¹
"spin a
thread"

ghzl ²
"flirtatious
speech"

lˤz
"indistinct speech"
HEBREW

Dotted line: Semitic cognate
Wavy line: Arabic permutation

zghl
"eject a
stream"

ġzl
"spin a thread"
UGARITIC

The analogy between ambiguous and indistinct speech is easy to see, and the analogy between ambiguous and flirtatious speech – speech that is indirect, insinuating, and allusive – is not obscure either. *Allusion* is ludic speech (from Latin *ad-* + *ludere* "to play"), and in many contexts "allusion" is the best translation of Arabic *kināya*, which is either the soul of *lughz* or, as al-Sharīshī (d. 619/1222) explains, a branch of it: "*Kināyāt* are a type of *alghāz*. At its root, *kināya* is when you say something by other means than the [ordinary] word for that thing, whether to aggrandize it, express contempt for it, or to confound your interlocutor".[46]

I am not the first to notice the connection of *lughz* and *ghazal*. In a study of modern Arabic psycholinguistics, ʿAlī Zayʿūr intuits "a link between riddles and sex through careful consideration of the root √*lghz* and permutation of its consonants (*taqlīb*), for this is the root that gives us both *ghazal* and *lughz*".[47] Although Zayʿūr puts little weight on the etymology he alleges, it is significant that he derives *ghazal* from √*lghz*, and not *lughz* from √*ghzl*. This is consistent

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[46]   *Al-kināyāt ḍarb min al-alghāz, wa-aṣl al-kināya an tadhkuru l-shayʾ bi-ghayr lafẓihi immā li-ibhām ʿalā jalīsika aw li-taʿẓīm aw li-taḥqīr* (al-Sharīshī 1992: I.30).

[47]   *Nalqā anna alfāẓ al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya… tusāʿidu ʿalā fahm ṣilatin bayna l-jins wa-l-lughz ʿabra taqlīb wa-tadabbur al-jidhr* l-gh-z. *Fa-l-jidhr ʿaynuhu yuʿṭīnā* ghazal *wa-*lughz (Zayʿūr 1984: 31).

with my analysis, as is his affirmation of the linguistic and discursive underpinnings of frivolous wordplay. Zayʿūr's preferred term for allusive speech is not *kināya* but *ishāra*, whose literal meaning is "to indicate through signs".[48] This comes very close to *innuendo* (a Latinate coinage from *in-* + *nuere* "to nod"), which is an essential component of both *lughz* and *ghazal*, as exemplified in these uncharacteristically ribald lines by Jamīl (verses 7–8 of a 17-verse ghazal poem, meter: *basīṭ*):

> *Hayfāʾu muqbilatan ʿajzāʾu mudbiratan*
> *tammat fa-laysa yurā fī khalqihā awadu*
> *niʿma liḥāfu l-fatā l-maqrūri yajʿalahā*
> *shiʿārahu ḥīna yukhshā l-qurru wa-ṣ-ṣaradu* [49]

> Slim-waisted from the front and big of bottom from behind,
>   the woman's perfect, with no defect in her frame.
> Such a good blanket for a man caught in the cold, who takes her
>   for his wrap when chills are frightful!

This example of ghazal poetry was selected for the overlap it presents with *lughz*. The implicit riddle of line eight – "How is a woman like a blanket for a man?" – calls an image of close physical intimacy to the hearer's mind through language that evades obscenity. This insinuating kind of allusion is typical of both lughz and ghazal, highlighting the common semantic ground covered by these nouns of speech.

If indeed $\sqrt{ghzl^2}$ originated out of $\sqrt{lghz}$, I surmise it would have occurred through language play of the kind that linguists call *ludlings*.[50] The English-language phrases "sotally tober" (for "totally sober") and "tea many martoonies" (for "too many martinis") may count as examples, and in the context of convivial intoxication it is easy to see how they arose. Another context for language play is the allusive discourse of flirtation (indicated in the pairing of *ghazal* and *lahw*) that could well have catalyzed the permutation of $\sqrt{lghz}$. Of course this falls short of proof of origin, and a theory is all

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[48]   Van Gelder 1998 notes that *ishāra*'s use as a rhetorical term for "allusion" goes back to Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar. As a Sufi term, *ishāra* refers to esoteric forms of communication, and to the meanings conveyed by these, and is often translated as "allegory".

[49]   Jamīl ibn Maʿmar 1958: 58-59; Ibn Maymūn 1999: II.351.

[50]   *Ludling* is a portmanteau of *ludere* and *lingua* compounded by Laycock 1972, and formally classified by Bagemihl 1989.

it is. My only categorical affirmation in the matter is that *ghazal* was a word for amatory discourse before it designated the amatory poetry preserved in manuscript tradition, and hence there is no sample set – no corpus of ancient Arabic flirtatious speech – on which to test this theory of √*ghzl²*'s derivation.

Even if it could be proven, it would have no necessary effect on the analysis and interpretation of *ghazal* poems, although understanding (2) *ghazila yaghzalu ghazalan* as a verb of speech has other consequences. One is that it goes against Qudāma's assertion that *ghazal* is the inward experience of eros, and *nasīb* the poetic expression of it. If "flirtatious speech" was *ghazal*'s original meaning, then *ghazal* as inner experience would have to be predicated upon the outward manifestation of it. This is not to claim that flirtatious speech predates eros (an absurd notion), but that the *word for* flirtatious speech came to *stand for* eros in this critic's estimation, and was thus construed at a remove from speech. Of the many parallel cases that might be mentioned, I choose *mayl*: an Arabic word for "bend" and "inclination" that also names one person's "attraction" to another. One might say that attraction is a subjective phenomenon that precedes outward expression. But no one would argue that *mayl* was first a name for inner experience and later a word for bending.[51]

Gazelles

Something else to be revised is our understanding of *ghazāl* "gazelle", the familiar *kināya* for the beloved, and its role in *ghazal*'s formation out of √*lghz*. Where Blachère saw this idiom as a source of "contamination" (intuiting the attraction to √*ghzl* of meanings that have nothing to do with spinning), we might instead see it as the nominal target of √*ghzl²*'s formation, such that the meaning of *lughz* was carried over with the added sense of "ambiguous speech, *spoken to a gazelle*". This comes close to how lexicographers defined *ghazal* all along. The presumption that "gazelle" as erotic idiom antedates *ghazal* "flirtatious speech" is no great presumption, given that we find it in the *Song of Songs* (2:9), and in Arabic poetry from the beginning.

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[51]   The observation that abstract and psychological word meanings derive overwhelmingly from concrete ones (e.g., the *concept* that derives from *concipere* "to grasp with the hand") is made in Larsen 2018: 193–194 (with references), and by Renate Jacobi 1985: 16: "It is a well-known psychological fact, which can be applied to individuals and to peoples as well, that the discovery of the world precedes the discovery of the self ".

This brings us back to ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾaʾs qaṣīda rhymed in *lām*.[52] ʿAmr is regarded as a poet of surpassing antiquity, an old man already in the lifetime of Imrūʾ al-Qays (d. ca. 550 CE), and is credited with many "firsts": al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994) said he was the first Arab poet to elegize his own lost youth (al-Marzubānī 2005: 20). Our sources for the *lāmiyya* are not themselves early, but I see no linguistic or stylistic evidence for its being a latter-day production (and neither did von Grunebaum).[53]

Nasīb's formal role as the opener of the polythematic qaṣīda – distinguishing it from ghazal, which depends on no such context – was expounded above. Their difference in terms of content remains to be shown. Ghazal poems can begin in any number of ways (with dialogue, narrative, description, etc.), and the beloved can be apostrophized as if absent, or addressed as if present. Meanwhile, the beloved in the *nasīb* is rigorously absent, entering the poem by means of three conventional devices.[54] Most common is the poet's encounter with the remains (*aṭlāl*) of the camp where the beloved's tribe once stayed. Then there is his recollection of her caravan's departure (*ẓaʿn*). The third is as

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[52]   Although Jamīl ibn Maʿmar was also called Ibn Qamīʾa (al-Āmidi 1961: 96–97, al-Iṣbahānī 2008: VIII.101), there is no confusing these poets for one another.

[53]   The unique manuscript of ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾaʾs *dīwān* (collected poems) is Süleymaniye MS Fātiḥ 5303 fol. 52r-63v. Confusingly, this manuscript has two paginations, of which I follow the small Hindi (Arabic) numerals used by previous editors, in preference to the large Arabic (Western) numerals that were inscribed after the insertion of an octavo quire between fols. 51 and 52.

Fol. 51v was formerly the last page of *al-Tanbīh wa-l-taʿrīf fī ṣifat al-kharīf* by Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ʿĪsā (d. 440/1047 or 1048). (The inserted quire is treated as a *mulḥaq* "appendix" to the text by the editors of Abū Muḥammad 2017: 163–179.) A copyist's statement on this page, dated to the month of Rajab 603 (= February 1207), provides a *terminus post quem* for the manuscript of ʿAmr's *dīwān,* which is written in another hand. It contains sixteen poems, of which the *lāmiyya* studied here is number ten.

Most of ʿAmr's poems are widely quoted, confirming their circulation throughout the Abbasid period. Not so our *lāmiyya*, whose earliest attestation is in the lexicon *Asās al-balāgha* by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143), where the sixteenth verse alone is quoted (al-Zamakhsharī 1998: I.71). The poem appears at full length along with four other poems from ʿAmr's *dīwān* in the anthology *Muntahā l-ṭalab* of Ibn Maymūn (d. 597/1200 or 1201), which was cited just above in n49 (Ibn Maymūn 1999: I.150–153).

The compiler of the *dīwān* is nowhere named, but the "Abū ʿAmr" mentioned in interlinear commentary (fol. 59v11, 60r11, and 61v1) is identified as Abū ʿAmr al-Shaybānī (d. 213/828), a scholar of Kufa (ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa 1965: 48). This would indicate that the *dīwān* was compiled by one of his students (perhaps Ibn al-Sikkīt, d. 244/858) if not by al-Shaybānī himself. To all appearances, it is a legitimate product of 3rd-/9th-century scholarship, with as much validity as any other manuscript source for pre-Islamic poetry.

[54]   Lichtenstadter 1932: 22–24 and 1974: 24–25; Jacobi 1971: 14–15.

a nighttime dream-vision (*khayāl*), and by some it was said that ʿAmr was the first to employ this motif (al-Murtaḍā 1955: 66). The *khayāl* of the beloved does not appear in ʿAmr's *lāmiyya*, but the other two motifs are in full effect, bringing *ghazal* into close proximity with its namesake animal (meter: *kāmil*):[55]

> Is your longing not stirred up by what remains here?
>   Or has ghazal not let go of your old man?
> Or did he die, slain by those who dwelt here
>   when the group departed, jilting him?
> You saw the send-off of the women's camels
>   up the mountain pass, at a trotting pace (*sayruhā ramalu*).
> Crimson were the tassels on their litters, and their
>   canopies of Edessan make, and crimson their sheer curtains.
> Beneath their shade rode [women] like   5
>   gazelles that roam the outflung sands.
> The day they left, your heart went mad on separation
>   from the unadorned gazelle who had enthralled it.
> Nothing outruns her to the fawn she rears.
>   She has a hiding-place at Dhāt al-Ḥādh
> where sunrise finds her, a shaded vantage-point
>   to keep her safe from ambush in the night.
> May her tent-sites and halting-places be watered well
>   by wooly clouds of black whose voices sing (*li-ṣawtihi zajalu*),
> lighting up gorgeous views   10
>   after dark, and letting down wet fringes –
> a swollen milcher by the South wind rapt
>   until it almost changes course and topples over.
> Its outer edge came down on al-Aṣnāʿ,
>   where its outpour flagged and lost its increase.
> Well may it water Imruʾ al-Qays ibn ʿAmra!
>   To mention noble men is an excellent thing.[56]

The elegance of this poem's thematic transitions (noted by C. J. Lyall in ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa 1919: 40) makes it hard to say exactly where the *nasīb* ends, up to the naming of the dedicant in verse 13 which marks the beginning of the

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[55]   MS Fātiḥ 5303 fol. 57v1–58v6, corresp. ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa 1919: 38–40, 1965: 88–103, and 1994: 50–53.

[56]   For English translation of the poem's six remaining lines, see ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa 1919: 41.

panegyric section (*madīḥ*) and a definitive conclusion to the poem's amatory content.[57] The description of the zoological gazelle in verses 7–8 does not quite finish it, as the ensuing *waṣf al-maṭar* ("description of the rain", for which see Hussein 2009) is called forth as a blessing on the human female beloved of the *nasīb*.

Where this poem was quoted above (at n6), *ghazal* was interpreted (*pace* Qudāma) as the intention or inner state that finds expression through *nasīb*. But that is not the only way to understand *ghazal* in this poem, where it is the rhyme-word of the first verse. A metapoetic reading is strongly indicated by Ibn Māja's hadith (n23), where *ghazal* means "vocal entertainment", and within the poem it is encouraged by two more rhyme-words naming types of poetry (*ramal* in verse 3 and *zajal* in verse 9).[58] One result of this reading is the self-reference it uncovers, as if the poet asked, "Do I still compose amatory trifles, at my advanced age?" – to which the rest of the *nasīb* is an affirmative answer.

If we accept this invitation to read *ghazal* as a term of art, then what does ʿAmr's *lāmiyya* tell us about ghazal? For one thing, it contains no speech addressed to a woman. This is consistent with ʿAmr's other poems, which contain hardly any direct discourse and no dialogue (a mainstay for Jamīl and ʿUmar). So if ʿAmr is engaging in ghazal, as the first line tells us that he is, it seems that mimesis of "conversation between men and women" (*ḥadīth al-fityān wa-l-fatayāt*) is not ghazal's namesake feature.

Another thing to point out is that the gazelle-like women of ʿAmr's poem are in the distant past. This is a convention of classical *nasīb*, which presents as the elegiac recollection of a dalliance in the poet's youth (Kinany 1950: 198–199). The innovation of first-/seventh-century ghazal was to report on liaisons that were ongoing, thus bringing amorous speech into the present-tense frame of the poem (Jacobi 1985: 15–16). The fact that this was a later development, at least in terms of observable literary history, is somewhat counter-intuitive (Stetkevych 1993: 55–57); in any case, the temporal conventions of *nasīb* can hardly have been Ur-features of ghazal.

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[57]   Imruʾ al-Qays ibn ʿAmra is an unknown figure (not to be confused with the poet Imruʾ al-Qays ibn Ḥujr, whose companion ʿAmr legendarily was). The name Imruʾ al-Qays ibn *ʿAmr*, on the other hand, is famous in Arabic epigraphy (from the Namāra inscription, dated 328 CE). And al-Āmidī 1961: 6–7 has some verses by a pre-Islamic poet of Kinda named Imruʾ al-Qays ibn ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Muʿāwiya. There may be some recollection of these names in "ibn *ʿAmra*", although the addition of final *tā marbūṭa* to a masculine proper noun would be an anomalous case of poetic license (*ḍarūra*) as far as I know.

[58]   See above van Gelder at n12.

The animal that I avow as ghazal's namesake has already been stated. The idiom is antedated by no Arabic poetry that we know. In ʿAmr's day, it was already conventional, and occurs elsewhere in his *dīwān*, in the same context of a caravan's departure:[59]

> *Wa-fī-hinna ḥūrun ka-mithli ẕ-ẕibā-*
> *ʾi taqrū bi-aʿlā s-Salīli l-hadālā*

> With them go dark-and-bright-eyed women like **gazelles**
> that crop the mistletoe on the heights of al-Salīl.

Description of gazelles is not a generic requirement of ghazal, but neither is it merely incidental. In ʿAmr's *lāmiyya* it echoes the first line's self-declaration as a work of ghazal – and echoes it doubly, proceeding from the gazelle-like women of the caravan to the portrait of a real gazelle hastening to her fawn's side. Both motifs are utterly conventional in early Arabic poetry, and even if the historical priority of ʿAmr's poem were irrefutable, nobody would claim him as their inventor. This brings to mind a phrase that I have never read or heard spoken aloud, and I offer it in all seriousness as the definition of *ghazal* as a poetic mode: *Al-ghazal huwa dhikr al-ghazāl* "Ghazal is *dhikr* of the gazelle" (i.e., of the beloved), where *dhikr* means at least four things: mention, description, recollection, and versification, all of which are carried out in ʿAmr's *lāmiyya*.

Afterword

One thread left unfollowed here is *song*, which is implicated in the verse by al-Aʿshā and clearly indicated in the hadith from Ibn Māja. If it can be shown that, rather than a verb of speech, (2) *ghazila yaghzalu ghazalan* began as a verb of song, then some claims in this article will need to be revised. For this, I advise that anecdotal reports of ghazal poetry being sung (as throughout *al-Aghānī* of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, d. 356/967) are not enough. Take Jamīl, whose verses have been used as song-texts by countless musicians, including Fairuz (b. 1934). In Jamīl's poetry, there is hardly any reference to song, nor do prose reports depict him in musical gatherings. So it is hard to claim that

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59   MS Fātiḥ 5303 fol. 62v8, corresp. ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa 1919: 56, 1965: 165, and 1994: 68 (verse 10 of poem no. 15, meter: *mutaqārib*).

ghazal was essentially a singer's métier in the first/seventh century. Assuredly, its genesis predates Jamīl, ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa, and probably the Jāhiliyya altogether, and whatever song culture might have incubated it lies beyond purview. The first step, which was to uncouple ghazal from spinning, has at least been achieved.

To analogies between language arts and fiber arts I am the furthest thing from hostile, and to intervene on contemporary poets' engagement with textiles is the last thing I want. There is no essentialist component to my theory. Let me assure the poets that if spinning is an operative metaphor for your work, or a material component of it, I am receptive and encouraging. And of course the fiber arts have their poetics too. It is to stake-holders in philology and early Arabic poetry that I say the burden has shifted. The claim that *ghazal* derives from spinning wants fresh evidence. Familiar, well-loved textile metaphor cannot be where analysis stops.[60]

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