Zeina Hashem Beck's Translingual Ghazals in Light of Historical Poetics

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Abstract: This article situates Zeina Hashem Beck's ghazals within the category of world poetry, aiming to avoid hegemonic notions of this category as much as possible. The ghazal is a form of lyric that originates as a mode in seventh-century Arabic poetry. Definitions depend on the historical period and linguistic tradition of its performance. Key moments of the form's migration include tenth-century adaptations to Persian and Urdu, as well as late eighteenth-century popularization in European languages. A translation project led by Aijaz Ahmad engendered a revival in English in the late twentieth century. However, many North American poets wrote free-verse versions criticized vehemently by Agha Shahid Ali in the introduction to his anthology *Ravishing DisUnities* (2000). Through the lens of historical poetics, this article argues that Hashem Beck draws on various stages in the ghazal's legacy for her own unique translingual iterations. Schooling in Lebanon and co-hosting of the podcast *Maqsooda* account for her indebtedness to Arabic poetry, yet she pays tribute to Shahid's anthology and writes anglophone ghazals that follow the rules upheld by the Kashmiri-American poet. Close readings of Hashem Beck's ghazals published to date identify translingual elements, as well as the ways in which motifs, such as love and exile lead to explicit localizations. The article thus demonstrates how Hashem Beck's ghazals combine influences from different phases in the form's development.

Keywords: ghazal; historical poetics; literary translingualism; lyric; Zeina Hashem Beck

1. Introduction

The ghazal is a type of poetry with roots in the classical Arabic tradition. It is one of the oldest and most widespread lyric forms (Burney 2019: 150; Ali 2000: 1). As the contributors to Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth's anthology *Ghazal as World Literature I* (2006) testify, what originated as a mode has become a popular form with adaptations throughout centuries and in many different languages. In the classical Arabic tradition, ghazal functioned as the introductory part of the longer qasida and was characterized by thematic rather than structural elements (Lewis 2012: 570). The development of the ghazal as independent form with a refrain ("radif") occurred during the twelfth century, when it gained popularity in Persian (Grewal 2022: 29; Lewis 2006: 121). The migration of the form to what was then called the "Occident" was facilitated by English and German poets of the eighteenth century (Grewal 36; Bauer and Neuwirth 2006: 16). Translations of Ghalib's Urdu

ghazals in the 1960s have prompted the sub-genre's more recent popularity in anglophone literatures (Ahmad 1971)[1]. A key collection of English ghazals is Agha Shahid Ali's *Ravishing DisUnities* (2000). This article situates Zeina Hashem Beck's ghazals within the category of anglophone world poetry and argues that the Lebanese poet's combining of elements from Arabic and English literary traditions reveals the absurdity of attempted divisions between foreign form and local content (Ramazani 2020: 130). Drawing on historical poetics (Kappeler 2020; Levine 2020; Mulholland 2020; Prins 2008; Kliger and Maslov 2016), analysis of Hashem Beck's ghazals traces their indebtedness to ancient origins as well as to contemporary adaptations. It identifies these lyric poems as translingual and decolonial.

In "A 'Ghazal' Sensibility on Valentine's Day," Hashem Beck explains her affinity for the dyadic form:

The couplets that make up the English ghazal are completely autonomous, which means one should be able to change their order without affecting the poem. One couplet could be about divine love, another about romantic love, another about friendship, another about revolution. One could make you laugh while another could make you cry — all within the span of one poem — as long as each ends with the established refrain ("radif"), which is preceded by the rhyme ("qafia") (Beck 2023).

This statement addresses a relevance of the ancient mode revolving around different kinds of love, as well as the formal characteristics developed during the ghazal's migration. Some of Hashem Beck's ghazals celebrate Arab artists, such as Abdel Halim Hafez and Samira Tawfiq. Others lament war and death as amplifications of love. Some revolve around the body and others around a sense of exile. With the exception of "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic," they all feature the fixed form's rhyming rules as explained by Shahid[2] in his introduction to *Ravishing DisUnities* (Ali 2000: 3). This article follows Sara Hakeem Grewal's call for historical poetics (Grewal 2022: 27) to understand the uniqueness of Hashem Beck's translingual, decolonial ghazal practice.

Historical poetics emerged from what is referred to as "new lyric studies" in North American academia (Glaser and Culler 2019; Jackson 2008; Terada 2008). It is understood as a reinforced interest in non-prosaic writing neglected in anglophone literary scholarship of the twentieth century. A central debate in the field addresses a "lyricization" hypothesis (Mulholland 2020), which is of no relevance for the analysis of Hashem Beck's ghazals. The turn to historical poetics derives, rather, from a need to understand details of the form's transformations. In particular, the focus is on Hashem Beck's familiarity with classical Arabic poetry while growing up in Lebanon (Qualey 2020), and on her development of a translingual poetics (Hambuch 2022; 2025). Due to explicit and implicit intertextuality, as well as to literary translingualism, Hashem Beck's ghazals, like Shahid's, express a spirit of decolonization (Mufti 2016: 72-73).

2. Legacy of the Ghazal in light of historical poetics

As Grewal points out in her article on ghazal as "World Poetry," definitions of the form depend on the historical period and the linguistic tradition one refers to

(Grewal 2022: 26). Hashem Beck is a contemporary poet in the anglophone, translingual tradition, and her ghazals consist of couplets with the second line ending in a refrain preceded by a rhyme, both of which are established in the first couplet. According to Franklin Lewis, author of the "ghazal" entry in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, this structure was developed in the twelfth-century Persian tradition (Lewis 2006: 121; Grewal 2022: 30). There are many examples of English ghazals, such as by Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, William Stafford, or Phyllis Webb, which do not follow this form, but present a free-verse adaptation instead (Winger 2009). In his introduction to *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000) Kashmiri-American poet Shahid disapproves of the free-verse versions of the ghazal. Grewal, in contrast, advocates Rich's practice as an example of "vernacularization," while criticizing Shahid's practice as an example of "worlding" (Grewal 2022). This dichotomy is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, the concepts developed by Gayatri Spivak (D'haen 2021: 12-13) and Sheldon Pollock (Mufti 2016: 12; Grewal 2022: 28), respectively, were focused on critical rather than creative writing. Secondly, the dichotomy overextends the use of the term "vernacular." Thirdly, although Shahid's introduction to *Ravishing DisUnities* is indeed patronizing, his ghazals are not, as will be explored further in section five. Grewal's premise, however, to avoid hegemonic criticism ignorant of crucial historical knowledge related to the ghazal's origins and transformations, guides the following analysis. Aamir Mufti's suggestion to rethink world literature in ways that make it responsive to the ghazal's "complex history" (Mufti 2016: 73; Grewal 2022: 26) requires re-iteration here. In contrast to Grewal, Mufti does not read Shahid's ghazals as examples of "worlding." The analysis of Hashem Beck's ghazals and their representations of Arabic establishes parallels to Mufti's readings of Shahid and the latter's relationship with Urdu. It further reminds of translingual practices during the ghazal's emergence as fixed form (Mahmoud 2022: 130).

Naomi Levine, when juxtaposing historical poetics with new criticism, dates the former back to reevaluations of nineteenth-century poetry and poetics in English departments at the end of the past millennium (Levine 2020). "Historical Poetics is," Ilya Kliger and Boris Maslov write, insisting on capitalizing, "first and foremost, a Russian scholarly tradition that approaches literary form as a recursive and mediated response to historical processes" (Kliger and Maslov 2016: 1). They trace the concept further back to the nineteenth-century philologist Alexander Vasesolvsky. James Mulholland confirms what is evident in these two views on the practice's origin, that "21st century historical poetics possesses enormous variety" (Mulholland 2020). A rare assessment that addresses both strands mentioned above, the first informed largely by English studies, the second by Slavic studies and comparative literature, Mulholland's article also identifies shared premises, for example that the study of poetry must account for historical understandings of poetry's social life and sub-genres. This is particularly relevant for an analysis of Hashem Beck's ghazals, as they appear influenced by different traditions from different historical moments.

Jonathan Culler proposes a simultaneous focus of new lyric studies in "different historical manifestations" as well as "new normative models" of lyric (Culler 2008: 205), thus drawing attention to the importance of contextual as well as textual approaches for poetry exegesis. This methodology also requires combining diachrony with synchrony, as illustrated, for example, by Fatima Burney and Sara Grewal's special issue of *Comparative Critical Studies* on "'West-East' Lyric: A Comparative Approach to Lyric History" (2020). Both directions, looking back at the legacy of the ghazal form as well as Hashem Beck's use of it as a "new normative model," in Culler's sense, are crucial for the following analysis, which centers on translingual, decolonial elements along with localizations in the Lebanese poet's unique iterations of the well-established form.

3. Method

This article situates Zeina Hashem Beck's ghazals within the field of world literature studies, specifically within the category of anglophone world poetry (Ramazani 2009; Ramazani 2020). Close readings of the fourteen ghazals published by Hashem Beck to date are guided by new lyric studies (Glaser and Culler 2019; Culler 2008; Jackson 2008; Terada 2008), in particular historical poetics (Prins 2008; Kliger and Maslov 2016; Kappeler 2020; Levine 2020; Mulholland 2020), to identify tributes paid by the contemporary Lebanese poet to a classical Arabic tradition and simultaneously to twentieth-century adaptations. While Hashem Beck's unique translingual use of the form displays rigid adherence to a challenging rhyme scheme, understanding of her content gains from considerations of two specific factors, literary translingualism and the intersections between the personal and the political as expressed in representations of place. These factors are addressed in sections five and six, respectively, after a closer look at formal elements in the following section. While it is thus important to study how form and content complement each other, it would be futile to consider either as "local" or "foreign" (Ramazani 2020: 130-131).

4. Formal elements of Zeina Hashem Beck's *Ghazals*

The ghazal became an increasingly prominent form in Hashem Beck's work. While *To Live in Autumn* (2014) includes only a single one, "Ghazal: Dream-fig," *Louder Than Hearts* (2017) features six ghazals, five of which are also included in the chapbook *3arabi Song* (2016). Both, *Louder Than Hearts* and *O* (2022), open with a ghazal prologue, "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic" and "Ghazal: With Prayer," respectively. The essay "A "Ghazal" Sensibility on Valentine's Day," referred to in the introduction of this article, appeared a year after *O* and refers to the poet's reading of Shahid's anthology *Ravishing DisUnities* (Beck 2023). As in the essay, Hashem Beck describes her appreciation of the repetition and variation afforded by the sub-genre in a conversation about *O*. "I love that unity in a ghazal is against unity" she states in this conversation with Sara Elkamel, "that the couplets are unified […] by how you will return to the rhyme and refrain differently every time" (Elkamel 2022). Not all ghazal poets and critics have agreed on such unity "against unity" in the history of the form (Grewal 2022: 38), but it is a feature emphasized

by recent experts, for example Shahid (Ali 2000: 13). In Hashem Beck's practice, resulting juxtapositions allow her to cover different content realms within a single poem. Regarding form, with only one exception, all of Hashem Beck's ghazals establish a refrain (radif), often also identified in the title, with preceding rhyme (qafia) in the first couplet (matla), and the repetition at the end of each couplet proceeds consistently. Like Shahid, she thus adapts her anglophone ghazal to rules established in a different language at the emergence of this lyric's fixed form.

In "Ghazal: Dream-fig," for example, the rhyme is the "-in" sound and the refrain is "you" (Beck 2014: 78). Ghazals, which identify the refrain in the title include "Ghazal: The Dead" (Beck 2017: 22), "Ghazal: Back Home" (p. 49), and "Ghazal: Hands" (Beck 2022: 9). Most of Hashem Beck's ghazals feature eight couplets. "Ghazal: The Dead" (p. 22), "This Country: Ghazal for Abdel Halim Hafez" (pp. 82-83), "Ghazal: Samira Tawfiq Sings a Love Poem" (p. 84), and "Incredible" (Beck 2022: 56) include only seven, while "Ghazal: My Daughter" (p. 40) and "Ghazal: In this City" (p. 83) comprise nine. The ode-imbedded ghazal, "Ghazal-Ode for My Body" (p. 49-51) is slightly longer with eleven couplets, but the longest is "What the Returning Do" with twelve. The lengths of these texts are thus well within the common range of five to fifteen couplets (Ali 2000: 3; Lewis 2012: 571). Yet, while adhering to classical conventions, a translingual representation of modern content renders the poems both innovative and decolonial. The following example from Hashem Beck's most recent collection illustrates the explained characteristics:

(1) *Incredible*, my daughter describes love, pauses after the *in-* I believe her.
If your daughter asks, *Can God be in my earrings and in the sky?* believe her.

(2) When your mother says, *it's cold outside, wear an undershirt and take a jacket*,
when she despairs and warns you, *you'll bite your fingers off when I die*, believe her.

(3) A girl speaks about what she tries to forget. She says, *Him, years ago.*
and they ask: *Are you sure?* and: *Perhaps* and: *Why now?* and: *Why believe her?*

(4) In the old map, the land is small. In the new map, the land is smaller.
When she becomes invisible, what will her children do? Try? Be? Leave her?

(5) Your friend texts she's afraid the plane might fall.
Between laughter and goodbye, believe her.

(6) When Father Ibrahim walks the old city, people greet him, call him *Hajj*.
Mecca is where you're willing to find her. Wherever she may lie, believe her.

(7) Your name means *what beautifies*. Words are incredible, and love is incredible,
and seasons are incredible, and when your death arrives in July, believe her (Hashem Beck 2022: 56).

The refrain in this ghazal is "believe her" and the preceding rhyme is the "-i" sound. The seven couplets revolve around the theme of family, referring to daughters, mothers, children, and one specific father, "Father Ibrahim," also known as "Hajj" (see couplet 6). The term "hajj," signifying "pilgrimage," refers to the five Pillars of Islam. It is an example of Hashem Beck's translingual elements elaborated on in the following section. The combination of different voices via direct speech marked in italics juxtaposes postmodern fragmentation with evocations of the past, as in the "old" map and the "old" city.

The sixth couplet most explicitly addresses divine love, while the first and second focus on love between family members, with friendship at the center of the fifth. As in the classical Arabic tradition, where ghazal was a mode rather than a fixed form, the sentiment of love is accompanied by the pain of separation. A mother predicts mutilation symbolic of the pain at her death in the second stanza. A caregiver's disappearance threatens in the fourth. The possibility of a friend's departure being final haunts the fifth stanza, and an explicit reference to the addressee's death occurs in the closing line. This death, "your death," is personified in the last refrain, "believe *her*" (emphasis added), which opens up a possible reading of other references to an unspecified "her" in the preceding, sixth stanza to foreshadow the reader/listener's death: "Mecca is where you're willing to find *her*. Wherever *she* may lie, believe *her*" (emphasis added). The personification, along with the location in the sacred city, point to a more metaphorical meaning of "death," possibly related to the agony of separation or to another force associated with love. This ghazal uses italics to identify direct speech but also as marker of the transliterated Arabic term "hajj." Not only does it, thus, rely on a classic form, but also on the language this form originates in, which happens to be the poet's first language. The status of the matrix language, English, as a result appears challenged. The following section focusses on other representations of Arabic in Hashem Beck's English ghazals.

5. Translingual poetics of Zeina Hashem Beck's *Ghazals*

The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism defines translingual literature as texts by authors who combine different languages or use a language that is not their first (Kellman and Lvovich 2022: 20). Hashem Beck's first language is Arabic, which means her writing in English can be considered exophonic. In addition, she interlaces her anglophone texts with Arabic and sometimes with

French. The notion of "hajj," as explained in the preceding section, is an example of such translingual practice. In "Ghazal: *This Hijra*," the foreign term takes the prominent place of the refrain. This poem also weaves an intertext of the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab in the line "Ya Sayyab! Sing us the song of the rain, of this eve, *this hijra*" (Qualey 2020). Other ghazals from *Louder Than Hearts* are explicitly dedicated to Arab artists, such as "The Country: Ghazal for Abdel Halim Hafez" (Hashem Beck 2017: 82-83) and "Ghazal: Samira Tawfiq Sings a Love Poem" (p. 84). The celebrations of musicians underline a preoccupation with rhythm and song. This section investigates the role translingual poetics plays for the musicality of Hashem Beck's ghazals. Such poetics may also evoke the translingual practices from ancient Arabic, Persian, and Urdu traditions (Mahmoud 2022: 130), since multilingual creative expression is as old as language itself and the British Empire was not the first to impose its tongue.

"I know the ode was supposed to be sung," Beck states in the conversation with Elkamel, "and that's interesting because in Urdu, the ghazal is sung too" (Elkamel 2022). Song texts today also count as (music) lyrics. Culler, among others, reminds readers that the ancient Greek tradition, where verse was accompanied by the playing of a lyre, is responsible for the term "lyric" (Culler 2008: 204). The structural elements explained in the preceding section all contribute to the musicality of Hashem Beck's ghazals. Translingual practice complements the resulting meter in many of her poems. *Louder Than Hearts*, like the preceding chapbook *3arabi Song*, explains references and foreign terms in a glossary at the end of the book. Sheikh Imam is, for example, identified there as an Egyptian singer and composer known for politically engaged and satirical songs. In "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic," he occurs in the fourth of eight couplets in juxtaposition with John Lennon of the Beatles:

> (4) Sure, there is always Lennon, but I wonder if we would have found
> Sheikh Imam, who reminds us the wound is awake and love speaks Arabic,
>
> (5) who reminds us no one can colonize a river and the tyrant
> is always afraid of the poet, especially if she speaks Arabic.
>
> (6) They say people who grow up in two languages have stronger
> memories, and they can hear the birds on the balconies speak Arabic,
>
> (7) and they know a mountain of orange life jackets looks like
> spring, though it won't revive the dead, who speak Arabic
>
> (8) but no longer need a visa, or translation and you, Zeina, what else
> can you do but whisper to these broken lines, *Speak. Speak Arabic* (Hashem Beck 2017: 11).

This poem recalls two of Shahid's ghazals discussed by Mufti in *Forget English!* The first of these texts features the refrain "Beyond English" (Mufti 2016: 195-196) and the second is called "In Arabic" (p. 197-198). Hashem Beck quotes the latter in "A 'Ghazal' Sensibility on Valentine's Day." As her own, Shahid's ghazals are translingual and characterized by intertextuality. Mufti aptly identifies war as the motif that brings together languages and their cultures in Shahid's "Beyond English." War is also implied by the notion of piling life jackets mentioned in couplet seven of "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic," with the connotation of refugees fleeing a warzone. A link could further be established with the tyrant referred to in couplet five, where the historical period of colonization is cited, a period characterized by the Colonial Wars. This is, of course, precisely the period in which the ghazal first appeared in European languages, and colonialist hegemonic audacity is evident, for example, in an infamous line by Von Platen: "Der Orient ist abgetan / Nun seht die Form als unser an"[3] (El-Shabrawy 1983: 74; Birus 2005: 427). Such a line amplifies the decolonial ethos in ghazals by Hashem Beck, where the European language appears appropriated via translingual poetics, as well as the adaptation of the ancient lyric form. Symbolically, the "Orient" is not only re-introduced but its traditions are honoured and cherished. At the same time, one should remember that Arabic itself was once an imperial language and the initial migration of ghazal, the mode, could well have had to do with imperialist activity (Mahmoud 2022: 125).

Mufti considers Shahid's ghazals unique because of the ways in which they stage an "uncanny encounter" (Mufti 2016: 194) between English and Urdu. The same applies to Hashem Beck's engagement with English and Arabic throughout the course of her ghazals. Her duets have been discussed as challenge to the status of English (Balaa 2025; Hambuch 2025). Luma Balaa uses terms such as "breaking" and "decentering" to that effect. Besides the examples cited already, "hijra" and "hajj," other Arabic transliterated terms in Beck's ghazals include "bahr," "Habibi" (Hashem Beck 2017: 49), "Hozn," "masr" (p. 82), "tibr," "tawfiq" (p. 84), and "maghreb" (Hashem Beck 2022: 83). Like the duets, in which Arabic script appears instead of transliteration, one ghazal in *O* is multiscriptual. In "Ghazal: My Daughter," the word "صوت" (sound; noise) is fit into the rhyme of the closing couplet, "we named you Aya, a line from the Qua'ran, the Bible. *Your beauty's* / *light, an aya*, goes the song. I believe: I hear your صوت, my daughter" (p. 40). Again, the concept of song features prominently. Dedicated to the poet's older daughter, this ghazal ranges among the more personal ones on an imaginary spectrum. Opposite to "'Ghazal: My Daughter' for Aya – after Marilyn Hacker" (p. 40), readers of *O* find "Flamingo" (p. 41), a poem dedicated to the younger daughter, Leina. In his study of the motherhood theme, Sleiman El Hajj remarks on the apologetic nature that is detectable throughout this last collection (El Hajj 2023: 58). Crediting Marilyn Hacker, however, one of the contributors to Shahid's *Ravishing DisUnities*, and establishing religious connotations via references to two sacred texts in the closing couplet, even the very personal "Ghazal: My Daughter" touches on the political, reminding of the impossibility to separate these two spheres. The firm situating of the lyrical "I" within a defined community also leads

to localizations, as already seen in the reference to Mecca in section four. The following section centers on the significance of place in a type of poetry the classical versions of which referred to the world in metaphysical rather than geographical ways (Burney 2019: 152). A decolonial ethos depends on the identification of a specific place at a specific time, the time during which colonialism introduced a certain language.

6. Localization in Zeina Hashem Beck's *Ghazals*

Even though classical ghazal did not draw attention to geographical locations, let alone nations, its practitioners and their audiences still belonged to communities involved, in one way or another, in forms of imperialism. Both, Arabic and Persian, were imperial languages during different historical periods (Mahmoud 2022: 120), leading to translingual creative expression during the respective times. It was during colonial times, however, during the ghazal's introduction in European languages, that a nationalist aspect became relevant. Hashem Beck's employment of localization confirms what Mufti observes about recent ghazal practice. He emphasizes a crucial shift between precolonial and contemporary iterations of the form. He defines the latter as "postcolonial and fundamentally *nonnational*" (Mufti 2016: 194; emphasis in the original). The rise of nationalism is linked to monolingual intent. Multilingualism, therefore, challenges such intent. The concept of translingualism aims to erase the binary. Representations of place in Hashem Beck's texts should be understood, similar to Shahid's, as anchoring of a speaker in exile. The second couplet of "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic" underlines the link between place and language. "If we were born in the cities we long for, Love – Paris, Prague, New York –," the speaker muses there, "what languages would they have taught us to speak?" (Hashem Beck 2017: 11). The only other ghazal including a European place name is the one celebrating Abdel Halim Hafez. Featuring as speaker in this ghazal, the Egyptian singer finds himself in a hospital in London in the second to the last couplet (p. 82). In the final line, via the hospital radio, he can "hear Cairo clearly" (p. 83). Egypt is personified in this poem, whose refrain is "this country." The second couplet ends with the singer reflecting on the fact that he "was born to sing this country" and in couplet five, he remembers that after Nasser's defeat he "sang that *Masr* was washing her hair" (p. 82). Both images show Hafez submerged in a memory of home. The melancholy he expresses for Egypt in this ghazal resembles Hashem Beck's regarding Lebanon in her first ghazal ("Dream-fig") and, much more pronounced, in the last one of her last collection, "Ghazal: Dear Beirut." Such explicit locations amplify the decolonial ethos of her translingual poetics as they remind readers of the specific circumstances leading to anglophone adaptations of a form that originates in ancient Arabic traditions.

Before a more detailed discussion of "Ghazal: Dear Beirut," it is useful to return to the quotation from "A Ghazal Sensibility on Valentine's Day," presented in the introduction. Hashem Beck highlights there that the stanzas of a single ghazal could be "about divine love, […] romantic love, […] friendship, [and] *revolution*" (Hashem Beck 2023; emphasis added). Whereas the first three can arguably be

more personal experiences, the last one presupposes public politics. Public politics are always grounded in specific times and places. Place, according to Burney, was of no significance in ghazals prior to the nineteenth century (Burney 2019: 155), although the choice of languages might have served a localization purpose anyway. Place names in Hashem Beck's ghazals, as demonstrated with the example of Egypt in "This Country," function as tributes and as tools for an exilic memory. Sometimes they appear in dedications, for example, "For Mosul and Sinjar, 2014" (Hashem Beck 2017: 48) or "For Syria, September 2015" (p. 49). In "Ghazal: In this City," the place names are less recognizable. They mark specific districts in Dubai, "Umm Suqueim" and "Satwa" (Hashem Beck 2022: 83), the city in which the poet was based prior to the Beirut explosion that prompted the last ghazal published to date.

"Ghazal: Dear Beirut" (p. 90) is the third to the last poem in *O*. The dedication reads, "For Beirut, August 4, 2020," the date of the tragic explosion caused by enormous amounts of ammonium nitrate stored at the port for several years.[4] Time and place are crucial for a text in which the latter becomes the addressee of the refrain. The following excerpt captures the speaker's despair heightened by the physical distance from the catastrophe.

> (1) You were never mine. I never yours.
> Isn't that true love's ode, dear Beirut?
>
> (2) I drove friends to the airport, watched them
> leave before I left. This wound is old, dear Beirut.
>
> (3) For the heart's laughter, for the eyes' silent
> dance, for grief – there's a road, dear Beirut.
>
> (4) The clocks stopped at 6:07. The windows are gone.
> From my exile, I click, I read, I implode, dear Beirut.
>
> […]
>
> (8) I carry a name and many cities. They're light and they're heavy.
> Tonight and every night, it's you I want to hold, dear Beirut (Hashem Beck 2022: 90).

The personified, localized capital of Lebanon functions as the beloved in this ghazal. Unapproachability appears as "true love's ode" in the opening couplet, where the 'ode'-sound is established as the rhyme and "dear Beirut" as the refrain. The second couplet highlights the sense of separation, while the fourth makes the exilic perspective explicit. The exile referred to here is predominant throughout the discussed poems. Physical distance is known to increase affection. By implication, it amplifies grief, leads the speaker to "implode." Instead of the poet's name, as in "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic," the closing couplet refers to "a name" that links

to "many cities," yet again emphasizing displacement. The fact that the cities in question are described as "light" and simultaneously "heavy" indicates the significance of perspective. The same thing could be perceived by the same observer differently depending on varying circumstances. It can always be perceived differently by different observers. The "they," finally, could refer to different cities, some "light," others "heavy." Regardless, the line expresses the kind of contradiction found in much of Hashem Beck's writing, and her ghazal practice seems particularly prone to it.

Such contradictions may be found between individual poems. While, for example, the ghazal that features as prologue in *O*, "Ghazal: With Prayer," questions the benefits of spiritual reflection, ending in "I'm through, I'm through, I'm through with prayer" (Hashem Beck 2022: 1), the last poem in the collection, "Morning Prayer" (p. 93), seems to give an affirmative answer to the same question. Dedicated to "Sour, Lebanon, August 2018," this text closes the book with profound gratitude. In the duets, contradictions feature between passages in different languages (Hambuch 2025: 464). In the ghazals, contradictions sometimes occur within individual lines, such as seen in "They're light and they're heavy" (Beck 2022: 90) or also in "They're odd, they're even" (Hashem Beck 2017: 84). Concerning the "many cities" carried by the speaker in "Dear Beirut," both "light" and "heavy" or alternating, function metaphorically. They may weigh on the heart, for example, or they may hold contrasting weights in a global hierarchy. Beyond these possibilities, the closing line of the ghazal clarifies, once more, the speaker's focus regarding localization. Not only at the time of writing "Dear Beirut," but "every night" it is Beirut that should be held, more so than carried.

7. Conclusion

This article studies the fourteen translingual ghazals Zeina Hashem Beck has published to date while drawing on historical poetics to highlight their decolonial glocality. The ghazal has been a popular form of lyric poetry since its emergence in pre-Islamic Arabic traditions. Throughout the centuries, it has flourished in many different languages, including Persian, Urdu, English, and to a lesser extent German and Spanish. The form's definition, therefore, depends on historical period as well as linguistic tradition, as Sara Hakim Grewal has emphasized (Grewal 2024: 26). The study of Hashem Beck's twenty-first century practice shows how the Lebanese poet's access to Arabic as well as English literary legacies accounts for a uniquely translingual and decolonial poetics. In an interview with Shirin Saad, Hashem Beck explains that she perceives of the ghazal as "a poem that could be a vessel of contradictions. Of seeming contradictions. […] as long as you go back to the rhyme and the refrain" (Saad 2023). This rhyme-refrain structure originates in the Persian introduction of the ghazal as fixed form (Lewis 2006: 121). It is upheld by the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali, whose *Ravishing DisUnities* inspired Hashem Beck, as she reveals in "A Ghazal Sensibility on Valentine's Day" (Hashem Beck 2023). Like Shahid's ghazals, hers are not only translingual but also characterized by intertextuality, as well as by a sense of displacement. The latter

relates directly to the kind of localization that distinguishes Hashem Beck's ghazals from their ancient predecessors.

While her first poetry collection includes only a single ghazal, the sub-genre gains prominence as its content becomes more diverse throughout the following two books. This development accompanies a growing impact of Hashem Beck's first language, Arabic, as seen in the transition from annotated transliterations to multiscriptual texts, as well as in the sources for intertextual references. All of the ghazals feature the typical range of five to fifteen couplets. With only one exception, they adhere to the rhyming rules established during the twelfth century (Lewis 2006: 121). They thus exhibit a firm grounding not only in a (post)modern episteme but also in the classical Arabic tradition and key moments of the sub-genre's development in-between. The lens of historical poetics is best suited to trace not only Hashem Beck's debt to various preceding ghazal practitioners but also to reveal her own innovative contributions to the form's long legacy.

In his analysis of Shahid's ghazals, Aamir Mufti points out the transformation from a precolonial and pre-national to a postcolonial and non-national text, "whose adequate reading therefore requires a nonnational – that is *exilic* – social imaginary" (Mufti 2016: 194). It may be emphasized that it is both the reading and *writing* of ghazals, such as Shahid's and Hashem Beck's, that require said social imaginary. The Lebanese poet's memories of the country symbolized as "Dream-fig" in her first ghazal (Hashem Beck 2014: 78) and the grief expressed for Beirut after the port explosion in *O*'s last ghazal depend on her displaced perspective. It is a displacement that ultimately challenges the division between global and local poetics. Furthermore, Mufti states that due to Shahid's translingual practice, "Anglophone poetry perceives its own environment as a multilingual one" (p. 195). The same holds true for Hashem Beck's work. It is precisely the exilic imaginary, this article argues, that leads to localizations in a form, whose ancient precursors were not concerned with place (Burney 2019: 155). Hashem Beck's second and third collections, *Louder Than Hearts* and *O*, feature a ghazal prologue, "Broken Ghazal: Speak Arabic" (Hashem Beck 2017: 11) and "Ghazal: With Prayer" (Hashem Beck 2022: 1) respectively, emphasizing the importance gained by this form in the development of Hashem Beck's work. In the process, the form is molded to accommodate the Lebanese poet's literary translingualism, as well as an expression of exilic memory. The third to the last poem in *O* is not only dedicated to a very specific place, Beirut, "Ghazal: Dear Beirut" is also dated, August 4, 2020, the day of the horrifying explosion. In this text, the personified city functions as the beloved, whose separation epitomizes "true love's ode" (p. 90). Like Shahid, Hashem Beck thus recalls different phases in the ghazal's very long legacy, while adapting it for her unique decolonial practice that defies attributions of global and local to form and content.

Endnotes

[1] For a detailed survey of North American ghazal practice, see Poole's "Mystik im Popland: Zeitgenössische Ghazal Dichtung und die Erfindung einer amerikanischen Tradition" (2014).

[2] I follow Aamir Mufti and Sara Grewal in referring to Agha Shahid Ali as "Shahid," which is also how the Kashmiri poet referred to himself in ghazals (Mufti 2016: 182).

[3] The Orient is done with / Consider the form ours now (translation mine). El-Shabrawy's reading suggests that this sentiment should be understood in the context of Von Platen's turn to Italian culture, prompted by his move to Italy.

[4] For an onsite non-fiction account of this tragedy see El Hajj, "Writing (from) the rubble: Reflections on the August 4, 2020 explosion in Beirut, Lebanon" (2021)

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