

There is a form of poetry which goes back to 6th century Arabia and it was domesticated in Iran in Persia in the 13th century. It's called the ghazal, spelled G-H-A-Z-A-L. It's been mispronounced, misunderstood, and mispracticed by many American poets, chiefly Audrey Richards and Jim Harrison so I've been trying to write some in English, following the form so people will know how it operates. The way it operates really is that you have couplets, and each couplet is like a separate poem, not connected to the others, but they are connected by a very strict scheme of meter and rhyme and refrain. The scheme occurs in both lines of the first couplet and only the second lines in succeeding couplets, so except for that scheme you are not supposed to see any thematic connections. I have a student who, in a poem of his, had a phrase "Arabic of it all" and I said to him, "Oh Tony, you know you could write a ghazal and you could have "of it all" as your refrain and "bic" would be your rhyme preceding your refrain. He didn't do anything with it and so a year ago I was at the Charlotte airport waiting for plane and I had a ... six hour delay. I ordered a scotch at the Cheers bar and this person said, the waitress said, "well for a dollar more you could have a double", I said sure get me a double, and before the evening was over I had four or five doubles and then this line kept coming to me, "Arabic of it all, Arabic of it all". So my first couplet was

I say that after all is the trick of it all
when suddenly you say Arabic of it all

So that was the first couplet. So the first couplet tells you the scheme, "of it all" is the refrain, "ic" is the rhyme preceding it. Are you with me?

I say that after all is the trick of it all
when suddenly you say Arabic of it all

Now one of the painful things for me in America is when somebody invites me for dinner and gives me Indian food. Because invariably the food is very yellow, it's always yellow, yellow, yellow you know what I mean? So and while I'm sitting there painfully and politely digesting the food the husband is telling his wife, "great curry honey, great curry".

White men across the US love their wives curry
I say oh no to the turmeric of it all

I'm glad, thank you for laughing. And then it goes on, you see you're allowed to in the scheme to be funny in one couplet and talk about god in another and about religion in another and politics in another. The last couplet you can invoke your own name, there are many couplets so I won't go through all of them. The last couplet was

For Shahid to the night went quickly as it came
After that old friend came the music of it all.

So I'll do another ghazal for you.

What will suffice for a true-love knot? Even the rain?
But he has bought grief's lottery, bought even the rain.

"Even the rain" is your refrain, "ought" is your rhyme, all right?

"our glosses / wanting in this world" "Can you remember?"
Anyone! "when we thought / the poets taught" even the rain?

After we died--That was it!--God left us in the dark.
And as we forgot the dark, we forgot even the rain.

Drought was over. Where were you? Drinks were on the house.
For mixers, oh my love, I'd wrought even the rain.

How did the Enemy love --with earth? air? and fire?
He held just one thing back till he got even: the rain.

After the bones--those flowers--this was found in the urn:
The lost river, ashes from the ghat, even the rain.

What was I to prophesy if not the end of the world?
A salt pillar for the lonely lot, even the rain.

New York belongs at daybreak to no one- only me
To make this claim memories brought even the rain

They found the knife that killed you but who's prints are these?
No one has such small hands Shahid, not even the rain.

Hope you recognize the allusion to E.E. Cummings there.