

## **Griffith University**

## **Anthony Lawrence**

## **Ghazal**

### Biographical notes:

Anthony Lawrence has published fourteen books of poems and a novel. His most recent collection, *Signal Flare*, was shortlisted for the Judith Wright Calanthe award. A new book, *Wax Cathedral*, is forthcoming from Pitt Street Poetry in 2016. He is the 2015 recipient of the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal for Literature. He teaches creative writing, including writing poetry, at Griffith University, Gold Coast.

### Keywords:

Creative writing – poetry – Ghazal – poetry, form – poetry, themes

I woke to a fine sifting in the air outside my tent  
where I'd set up camp, on the mend  
from analgesic amendments  
to a life I'd found wanting, then wanting again.

A storm was approaching in a tidal, not agrarian way.  
And while it's tempting to name  
my location as being where wind  
is known as *khamsin*, *chinook*, *simoom*

I was fifty miles from Broken Hill  
not high in Colorado or the Sinai, and I was clean  
not working for visions  
on the opiates altitude and reclusiveness.

And this was, colloquially, bull dust  
coming on as a red rolling wave  
throwing up leaves and sticks like birds  
beaten from cover. And despite trying  
to stop the storm from getting in  
I could taste earth and sky in each breath.  
And when the flysheet turned to a smear of blood  
on a slide, I began to revise

with an abrasive, restored sense of hope  
the poem I'd been breaking down for days.  
Instead of lowering the worn signal-arm  
of my name in the last lines, I signed off  
with my father's initials, as if he'd just  
passed through the tent's molecular structure  
to give me the all-clear  
concerning recovery, poetry and weather.

## Research statement

### *Research background*

American poet Jim Harrison observed that the Ghazal's ancient form made it ideal for exploring contemporary issues. He said his expression found form in the Ghazal to define 'whatever aspect of our life now that seemed to want to enter my field of vision' (1971: 26). The Ghazal's themes were traditionally specified – love, separation, carnality and mysticism – but these are also key themes in contemporary verse.

### *Research contribution*

Central to my ongoing contribution to research into poetics and the writing of poetry is an engagement with various forms and styles, in which I offer contemporary alternatives to traditional modes. 'Ghazal' is both a commentary on a traditional form and a reworking of it. In *Beautiful & Pointless*, critic and poet David Orr discusses style, shape and form, and identifies 'some distinct, often nameless category called "X" that we think (and believe the poet thinks) we're supposed to recognise as being associated with the poem' (2011: 70). My poem 'Ghazal' works to suggest, rather than name directly, this nameless category (or aspect) of formal poetry.

### *Research significance*

Both my most recent, *Signal Flare* (2013), and forthcoming collection, *Wax Cathedral* (2016), contain poems that, like 'Ghazal', utilise aspects of, or embrace fully, traditional styles and forms (iambic pentameter, sonnets, villanelles, ghazals) and imbue them with contemporary themes. In this poem, by utilising and referencing the Ghazal, but *not actually writing in the form*, there is a potent sense of loss of intimacy with the form, the self and family. By citing the form's potential impact in the poem's last lines, the expectation the title creates is thwarted and attention diverted to the poem's inner workings.

## Works cited

Harrison, J 1971 *Outlyer and Ghazals* New York: Simon and Schuster

Lawrence, A 2013 *Signal Flare* Glebe, NSW: Puncher & Wattmann

Orr, D 2011 *Beautiful & Pointless* New York: Harper Collins