

Glass: A Journal of Poetry

ISSN: 1941-4137

POETRY THAT ENACTS THE ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE PURITY OF GLASS

Glass Poetry Press

editor@glass-poetry.com

January 17, 2018
Edited by Stephanie Kaylor



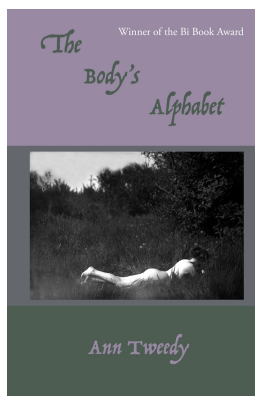
Siham Karami's poetry and critical work has been published in such places as *Tupelo Quarterly Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Able Muse*, *American Book Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and *Orchards Poetry* as featured poet. Nominated multiple times for both the Pushcart prize and Best of the Net, she blogs at sihamkarami.wordpress.com

Siham Karami

REVIEW OF *THE BODY'S ALPHABET* BY ANN TWEEDY

The Body's Alphabet
by Ann Tweedy
Headmistress Press, 2016

In her first full-length collection, *The Body's Alphabet* (Headmistress Press, 2016), Ann Tweedy comes at us full-force with her own truth, both personal — the suffering of being raised by a mother afflicted with insanity, and the difficulties of being openly bisexual, where she "could choose but won't" — and universal, a word I don't use lightly, where she sees in the natural world, to which she is intimately attuned, the same struggles to find home, a place of meaning and validation in the larger sense. Her insights' striking breadth will bring the reader back to this book again and again, as she questions the lines we draw in issues of sexuality, human relationships, and our relationship with the natural world.



Finding and defining home is a need as urgent as survival and as basic, a fact underscored by the recent mass exodus of refugees from war-torn and oppressive societies in Africa and the Middle East. In more personal wars, certain social groups afraid of/hating others, as we have seen with the election of Donald Trump, can bring the same xenophobia-based difficulties to finding home in one's own country. "Social norms" create spaces, both physical and psychological, in which individuals do not exactly fit. In the case of LGBTQ individuals, creating a home for oneself is an imperative with particular poignancy. As a bisexual woman, the sense of being an outsider among outsiders is intensified, as she expresses here in "Outing:"

i see myself now, for six months caught between planets:
loving a man i mean to spend my days with and a woman
who dances on-stage for anyone who can afford
cover. her repertoire of male voices, from pop
to country, thrills because of an underlying forgery

do you think i could write myself back into
the hewn dimensions of any single space? home is the structure
you build when nowhere else will have you.

These last two lines sum up not only the author's experience, but that of all displaced people. Tweedy's advocacy as a lawyer representing Native American tribes speaks to her level of empathy with finding a place for oneself. As she describes in "dirt under the fingernails," there is no ready-made welcoming "place" for a bisexual woman:

married, bisexual, i am dirt under the finger-
nails of both communities: speck
of black that greys the perfect white
of straightness, speck of white that greys the perfect black
of queerness.
oversexed, non-monogamous bi woman,
i could choose but won't.

She defines her self in that act of choosing not to choose between the pre-

[Home](#)

[Archives](#)

[Poets Resist Archives](#)

Special Features:
• *Pulsamos: LGBTQ Poets Respond to the Pulse Nightclub Shooting*
• *Moms Respond*
• *Tundras*, edited by Rosebud Ben-Oni

[Interviews](#)

[Reviews](#)

[The Glass Chapbook Series](#)

[About](#)

Submission Guidelines:
• *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*
• *Poets Resist*
• *Reviews*
• *Interviews*

[Store](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Awards & Nominations](#)

[Recommended Reading](#)

[Masthead](#)

Glass Poetry Press



established "norms" that do not work for her. By resisting the pressure to forcibly fit into such molds, she creates an honest home where she can feel free to simply live, living being a shared activity.

Of course, earth is our ultimate home, and this collection includes strong poems engaging with the natural world in unusual ways. In the poem "bulkheads," which straddles the gap between how species think about humans and how humans interact with each other, Tweedy considers the bald eagle's view of us:

bald eagles, too, look straight at you.
they could care less if you mean
well or have a gun — they know
how little we amount to and are willing
to risk telling us. if one's ever
peered at you from a tree limb,
looking down its hooked beak the way
a disgruntled judge might consider you over the ridge
of her reading glasses, you know what i mean.

What is refreshing here is that she does not project human wishful thinking onto the natural world; rather, she assesses known facts about our relationship to it, and reimagines us from their point of view. In "Nature Essay," after describing the behavior of hummingbirds and how they mark and protect their territory, which may coincidentally be one's backyard, she concludes with an observation about our notions of power, ownership, and knowledge in the greater context of the world we live in:

you might apprehend that you do not really
own your property: some hummingbird probably
has an equally valid claim and knows it more intimately.

But most timely is her observation about salmon in "late fall, Skagit chum run:"

salmon know there is
something more important
than their own lives. upstream
a few sluggish bodies
flicker in their last
arcs. eyeing heaven and hell,
the rest float — pummeled, broken
through realization.

Indeed, these poems bring us the possibility that we humans are fighting our everyday survival fights and routines oblivious to larger changes challenging the very survival of the world we depend on. Are we too salmon on their last run (or two)? And in that context, the freedom of each of us to live our lives fully realized becomes more urgent. In Tweedy's words, from "life without descartes":

if you could look at love and see
love and not a struggle against hate
...
if

you named all the parts of yourself
whole, beautiful: the darkness
and the light need each other
you never have to choose

Having survived her mother's insanity and the ridicule of neighbors with her own compassion intact, and having survived the inevitable heartache that come from loving a man and a woman at the same time (the jealousies in this case coming from the woman), physically and emotionally, Ann Tweedy brings us her unvarnished insights with honesty and a beauty that gives us, in this time when finding a place to call home in this world has reached critical mass in many ways, words of empowerment and belonging.

[Visit Ann Tweedy's Website](#)
[Visit Headmistress Press' Website](#)

