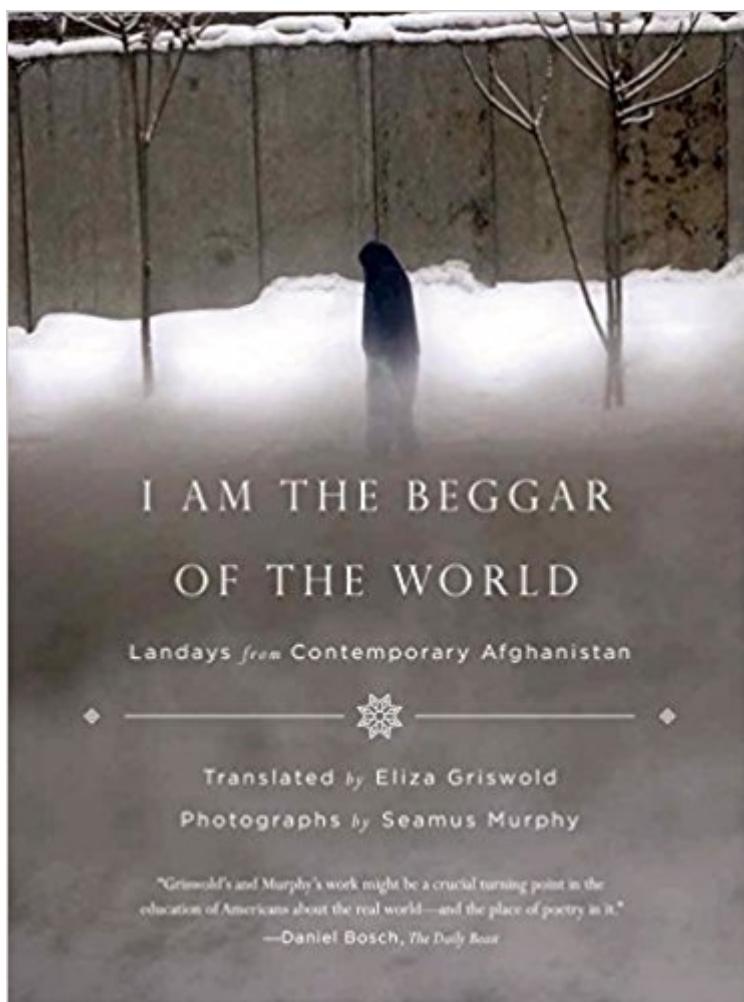


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# I Am The Beggar Of The World: Landays From Contemporary Afghanistan



## Synopsis

An eye-opening collection of clandestine poems by Afghan women Because my love's American, blisters blossom on my heart. Afghans revere poetry, particularly the high literary forms that derive from Persian or Arabic. But the poem above is a folk couplet — a landay, an ancient oral and anonymous form created by and for mostly illiterate people: the more than 20 million Pashtun women who span the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. War, separation, homeland, love — these are the subjects of landays, which are brutal and spare, can be remixed like rap, and are powerful in that they make no attempts to be literary. From Facebook to drone strikes to the songs of the ancient caravans that first brought these poems to Afghanistan thousands of years ago, landays reflect contemporary Pashtun life and the impact of three decades of war. With the U.S. withdrawal in 2014 looming, these are the voices of protest most at risk of being lost when the Americans leave. After learning the story of a teenage girl who was forbidden to write poems and set herself on fire in protest, the poet Eliza Griswold and the photographer Seamus Murphy journeyed to Afghanistan to learn about these women and to collect their landays. The poems gathered in *I Am the Beggar of the World* express a collective rage, a lament, a filthy joke, a love of homeland, an aching longing, a call to arms, all of which belie any facile image of a Pashtun woman as nothing but a mute ghost beneath a blue burqa.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* In *The Tenth Parallel* (2010), Griswold offered keen geopolitical insight by cataloging ongoing religious strife in contentious locales, including Indonesia, Nigeria, and Sudan.

Here, the globetrotting Griswold recruits renowned photographer Seamus Murphy to provide the visuals, and turns her attention to Afghanistan in order to record a collection of landays, Afghani folk poems, typically sung by women in private. With the help of local guides and Pashto translators, Griswold convinces women to share couplets that touch on a wide range of emotions and themes, from love and grief to separation and war. Because the lyrics remain anonymous over generations, Afghan women use them to express freely their desires and frustrations, yet still risk violating Taliban strictures against song and dance. From heartbreakingly indictments of fathers who sell their daughters into slavery to humorous, techno-savvy posts on a Pashto Landay Facebook page, Griswold's selections illustrate the rich potential of this poetic form, at once contemporary and timeless. Murphy's stunning photographs complement the text perfectly, capturing children at play in refugee camps outside Kabul, smiling U.S. soldiers pointing squirt guns, and armed militants marching through the mountains. A timely, indispensable, and unforgettable poetic documentary. --Diego Bafiez --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Griswold's translations mark a stunning handling of [landay's] complex 'beauty, bawdiness, and wit.' Flanked by Murphy's photographs, with their striking blend of wartime journalism and human compassion, Griswold's couplets are peppered with brief prose passages in which she delves into cultural and historical traditions that inform the humor and gravity of her translations . . . a collection that may indeed be remembered as a groundbreaking work of translation and poetic journalism. Publishers Weekly "Eliza Griswold and Seamus Murphy have made a book that is necessary reading for anyone who has ever made assumptions from a distance about what a burka-wearing woman might be like, and for anyone who cannot fathom how poetry could get you killed. In other words, this book is a must-read for every U.S. citizen . . . Griswold's and Murphy's work might be a crucial turning point in the education of Americans about the real world--and the place of poetry in it." Daniel Bosch, The Daily Beast "The book's greatest strength is the complicated spectrum of voices that it allows these women, whom we wouldn't otherwise know anything about. *I Am the Beggar of the World* casts Pashtun women as vibrantly self-aware and autonomous . . . Griswold finds a way to present these poems and images in juxtaposition so that they evoke a multiplicity of voices and views, giving an almost democratic quality to the anthology's populace." Jay Deshpande, The Millions "Starred review" From heartbreakingly indictments of fathers who sell their daughters into slavery to humorous, techno-savvy posts on a Pashto Landay Facebook page, Griswold's selections illustrate the rich potential of this poetic form, at once contemporary and timeless.

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Diego Bafiez, Booklist Starred Review "I Am the Beggar of the World, translated by journalist and poet Eliza Griswold, with photos by Seamus Murphy, collects passionate, polemical, and traditionally secret two-line folk poems by Pashtun women on topics ranging from education, war, and personal autonomy to marriage, faith, loss, and homeland.

Elle "I Am the Beggar of the World is a great and satisfying work. I applaud Eliza Griswold and Seamus Murphy. It is an essential look at the women of Afghanistan and the voices of dissent at risk of being suppressed when the American forces withdraw.

Sahera Sharif, Member of Afghanistan's Parliament, founder of nationwide women's literary circle, Mirman Baheer "The poems in I Am the Beggar of the World cut like a knife--they are short, sharp--and leave you bleeding. They are the most direct voices of the inner life of Afghan women, and prove that these women, despite all hardships, are still standing. These two-liners make the reader feel close to the women that we've seen so often on the screen wandering like blue-clad ghosts on the dusty roadsides. A heart is a heart anywhere in the world.

Afje Isnerstad, author of The Bookseller of Kabul "I Am the Beggar of the World is a revelatory book about Afghanistan, one sure to turn all the stereotypes about the country's women on their heads. The poems, equally art and reportage, are often poignant, more often witty, even pungent. They, along with the accompanying text and photographs, illuminate the beauty of the country and its culture, the sadness of its history, and the humor, the hopes, the bitterness, and even the contradictions its women--no different than women anywhere--carry in their hearts. This is an important book, but to describe it only that way is to neglect how deeply pleasurable it is to read.

Amy Waldman, author of The Submission "Eliza Griswold brings a poet's sensibility, a folklorist's skills, and a journalist's savvy to these startling and incendiary folk poems by Afghan women, which she has so daringly collected and translated. With its arresting photographs and heartbreakingly direct two-liners, I Am the Beggar of the World enlarges our sense of the work that poetry does in the world.

Edward Hirsch, author of The Living Fire "This is poetry of a rural tradition that is as world-wise, war-wise and uniquely sophisticated as any collection of writing by women, anywhere.

Carol Muske-Dukes, author of Twin Cities

These are poems, so I didn't answer the questions about violent content, point-of-view, etc. I really

wanted to like this collection more than I did, but there became a strange sameness to the poems as I read more of them. I would only recommend it if you want to know what Landays are and want to see some examples -- but then, you can do that on the web just as well.

The landays and women who wrote them are enlightening and inspiring. I went to a reading by Eliza Griswold and was so moved by the amazing prose these women have created and the lengths they go to in order to share them with each other, often risking their lives. It's devastating how these women and their voices are oppressed by the Taliban. Hearing these poems makes a great case for funding more education for girls in Afghanistan and other Taliban-run areas.

This is a terrific collection of poems from women whose work is rarely noted. I'm an avid fan of the works by Middle Eastern women and teach a course on this literature at my university. There is an amazing body of work from the women of this region.

Beautiful, moving and mesmerizing language. Courageous research. Stunning, haunting photographs. A work of great beauty. A book to read and re read over and over again.

Womens' oral poetry from Afghanistan--The explanatory sections weren't quite as seamless as I would have liked--Although they were necessary for understanding the Landays

Very interesting to read. Revealing thoughts and emotions of women in a war torn land. I recommend this book to the U.S. State service.

An interesting and haunting book.

I liked it so much that I bought a second copy for a friend.

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