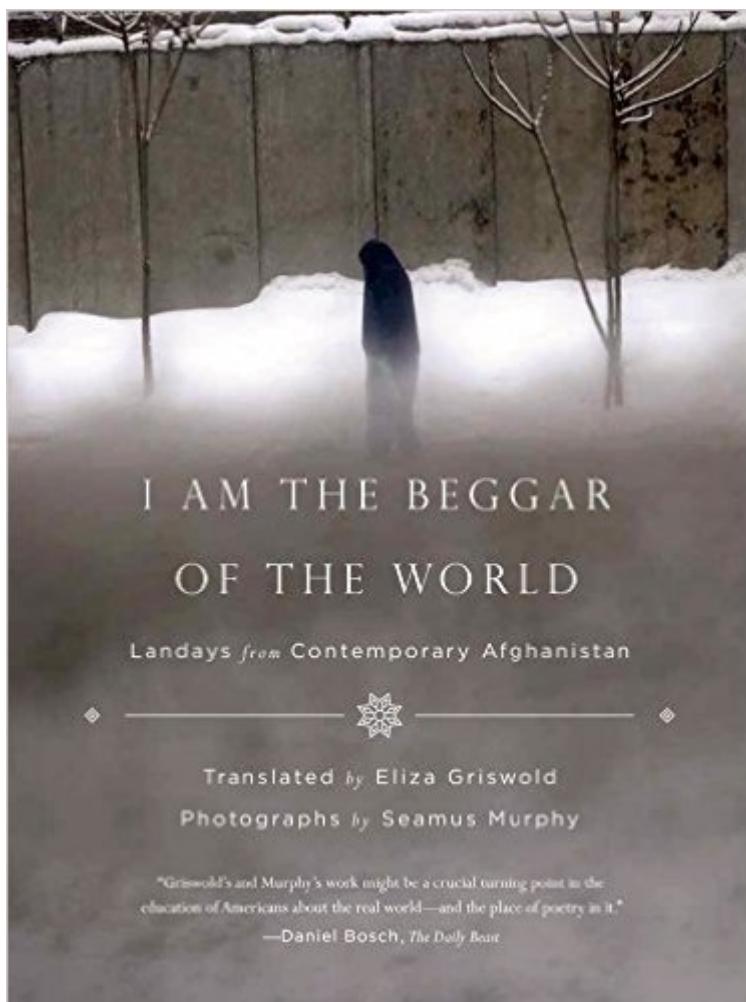


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# I Am The Beggar Of The World: Landays From Contemporary Afghanistan



## 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

Landays, Afghan two-line poems, some centuries old, have an ephemeral quality, like a scrap of smoke in the air, or a remembered scent, hardly there. They are sung, or recited accompanied by a

drum to keep time. Landays began among nomads and farmers and were sung around a campfire, though now both men and women use them in their daily life, as humor, as riposte, as an expression of grief or protest. Eliza Griswold travelled to Afghanistan with the photographer Seamus Murphy when they'd heard a young woman was persecuted, and died, for writing poems. Her name was Zarmina. Zarmina also recited ancient landays, perhaps changing a word or two to reflect her own life. Griswold began to collect landays and with the collection she has shared with us, we are allowed deep into the national psyche. Griswold explains her translation process, for which she won the 2015 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation. First the translation would be literal and then she would work with academics, writers, journalists to achieve something in English approaching the power of the poem in Pashto. By every measure, she has succeeded. It is extremely rare for a journalist to manage to portray with such depth, honesty, clarity, and humanity a culture foreign to readers. Griswold manages it in a slim book of poetry. On two facing pages she has placed one of Seamus Murphy's photographs, and a two line poem. On the overleaf she explains the context of the poem and its meaning. Griswold's restraint highlights the power of the landays. Some landays are just about the length of a tweet. Your eyes aren't eyes. They're bees. I can find no cure for their sting. Some landays recited or sung at celebrations are recorded and shared with relatives or friends.

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