



# Teeth

*Aracelis Girmay*

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## Teeth Aracelis Girmay

Stunning, highly original poems that celebrate the richness of the author's multicultural tradition, *Teeth* explores loves, wars, wild hope, defiance, and the spirit of creativity in a daring use of language and syntax. Behind this language one senses a powerful, inventive woman who is not afraid to tackle any subject, including rape, genocide, and love, always sustained by an optimistic voice, assuring us that in the end justice will triumph and love will persevere.

*LOVE,  
you be the reason why  
we swagger & jive,  
lift the guitar, & pick up the axe.  
when it is i tilt my hat to the side,  
wearing colors & perfumes, it's cause, love,  
you did it to me. oh,  
you do sure turn my tongue to fiddle,  
& make the salt taste sweet. man,  
i don't need a rooster, or peacock even,  
to help me spend my time, nope,  
just you, love, right & solid as  
a line.*

## Teeth Details

Date : Published June 1st 2007 by Curbstone Books (first published 2007)

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Author : Aracelis Girmay

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## From Reader Review Teeth for online ebook

### Destroydecay says

Kingdom Animalia was so fantastic, inspiring, and powerful that I had too high of hopes for this book.

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### Rich says

Ara writes the way she talks: the use of repetition, the swirling of favorite words around the mouth like a Jolly Rancher. A good good book from a good good poet. Evocative of Larry Levis, unapologetically political, unflinching images that are not afraid to meander. Particular favorites: "The Piano," "Arroz Poetica," the Cyclops Mary cycle. What every poet should wanna be when they grow up.

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### Luke Hillier says

I read Kingdom Animalia about a year ago and had really high hopes for this collection, its predecessor. Although it wasn't as strong or spellbinding as that book (and it'd be a bit shocking if it was, to be honest), I still found these to be really stunning as well. A key difference, to me, was that Kingdom Animalia seemed to all be speaking from the same place and all of the poems were echoing off of each other, whereas this felt a lot more disjointed. In some ways, this actually appeared intentional, a reflection of Girmay's familial geographic diversity (of course best illustrated in the stunning closing poem) and in that vein it works well. At other points, however, it felt like too much a shift to go from exploring war crimes to childhood memories; that isn't to say the transition shouldn't be made, but that it felt a bit jerky for me. With that said, she's certainly adept at both ends of the spectrum. Her more politicized, wide-angle poems express a seething rage and heartbreak of course best embodied by "Arroz Poetica" while her smaller-scale, personal pieces like "Santa Ana of Grocery Carts" carry a warmth and intimacy and vulnerability that's really engaging. Girmay has an expert intuition for rhythm, syntax, and repetition, the latter of which is probably most impressive of all considering its prevalence here and how stale or annoying that would be in the hands of most poets.

"Arroz Poetica" is the undeniable stand-out; I had to set the book down and walk around a bit after finishing it. "Then Sing," "Here," "Scent: Love Poem for the Pilón," and "Epistolary Dream Poem after Finding a Schoolbook Map" were my other top favorites with quite a few more not far behind them.

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### Lisha Adela says

Aracelis' work is meant to be read out loud. Indeed I did have the pleasure of hearing her read as one of the featured poets in Tempe, AZ National Poetry Month series. She is a dynamic reader and when later I read her poems, I could still hear her voice wrap around the words. Her use of language is singular and she uses "&" instead of the word "and" and somehow that works. Normally I would find that distracting.

"Someday you have to accept your death if you expect to raise up from this land. Got to lay down long enough to let the whole world take you."

Aracelis' multi-culturalism is such an asset as you read poems from all over the world in her body, her use of

language and in acute observation.

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### **Alessandra Simmons says**

Its good to keep a copy of this book nearby.

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### **Joe says**

Some seriously wonderful poems in this collection.

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### **Sita says**

Reader, I wept.

### **Consider the Hands that Write This Letter**

*after Marina Wilson*

Consider the hands  
that write this letter.  
The left palm pressed flat against the paper,  
as it has done before, over my heart,  
in peace or reverence  
to the sea or some beautiful thing  
I saw once, felt once: snow falling  
like rice flung from the giants' wedding,  
or the strangest birds. & consider, then,  
the right hand, & how it is a fist,  
within which a sharpened utensil,  
similar to the way I've held a spade,  
match to the wick, the horse's reins,  
loping, the very fists  
I've seen from the roads to Limay & Estelí.  
For years, I have come to sit this way:  
one hand open, one hand closed,  
like a farmer who puts down seeds & gathers up  
the food that comes from that farming.  
Or, yes, it is like the way I've danced  
with my left hand opened around a shoulder  
& my right hand closed inside  
of another hand. & how

I pray, I pray for this  
to be my way: sweet  
work alluded to in the body's position  
to its paper:  
left hand, right hand  
like an open eye, an eye closed:  
one hand flat against the trapdoor,  
the other hand knocking, knocking.

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### **Adriana Miele says**

This collection is arresting.

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### **Jenny says**

The rhythms and sounds of these poems seem to match up with something within me - despite the fact that some of Girmay's topics are foreign to me, I feel a link of understanding. Especially like "Conjugation," "Consider the Hands That Write This Letter," "The Dog," and "Santa Ana of Grocery Carts."

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### **Jennifer Collins says**

Girmay's poems are varied and aware, wandering into different territories and balancing smoothly between language-play and observation. In many of them, there's such power that a reader is hard-pressed to not stop, consider, and reread the same poem once again--not because of a lack of clarity, but because there's a drive to re-experience it, and gain some more drops of meaning and emotion. It's true that not every poem lives up to this description--a few are oversoaked in description or expansion--but most of the poems here will be well worth the time for poetry lovers who want their poetry to come with an awareness of the world, and not only self-awareness.

All told, I truly enjoyed this one, and have to recommend it on to anyone who enjoys dipping into contemporary poetry; it's a lovely, thoughtful read, with much to appreciate and consider.

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### **Craig says**

A tiny bit disappointing to me, personally, after the mind-blowing *Kingdom Animalia* collection, but I found that I was still in love with this poet's fierce voice by the time I finished the book.

And the opening poem - *Arroz Poetica* - just fantastic.

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### **Tasha says**

Estefani Lora makes me cry every time.

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### **Melanie says**

Audacious, fierce poetry, but now five years after I first read it I can see that some of the work leans too much on sentiment & romanticism, but having said that it is done very unselfconsciously. 'Litany' and 'Here' are standouts poems.

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### **Laurel L. Perez says**

A fierce collection that does not shy away from genocide, rape, love, poetry that avoids the sentimental, and breaks the content wide open. I have a feeling the images, the propelling momentum of this collection will not soon leave me.

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### **Tara Betts says**

I've heard Aracelis read quite a few of these poems, read quite a few of them to my boyfriend when we're driving in the car together, and now I've read it cover-to-cover today. I am completely in love with the opening poem "Arroz Poetica," "Ode to the Watermelon," the title poem, "For Estefani Lora, Third Grade, Who Made Me a Card," the pair of poems for 'Cyclops Mary' and "Here." There are not many debut poetry collections that I encounter that have more than four or five poems that fascinate me, but these are the ones that tug at me in the most immediate ways. Yet there are so many more that reflect the multiple experiences of Ms. Girmay, who claims Puerto Rican, African American and Eritrean cultures as her poetic roots. There are political poems about rape as a weapon of war, and a bilingual ode to the letter "B," and tracing back a great-grandfather making his way to the United States. After I read the last poem, I just felt like dreaming and writing and seeing images unfold in my head and thinking that politics can still move us to be human, loving and civilized unlike the ways these words are flippantly thrown around. There's also a moving introduction by poet Martin Espada.

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