



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Four Cities

By Hala Alyan

Black Lawrence Press, September
2015

Reviewed by the TWIP Team

Four Cities by Hala Alyan is a journey, on a heavy carpet, from New York to Damascus. Hala, who invokes elves and burning tires, is searching for home and love in places that everyone is trying to escape.

In her second manuscript, which will be published this month by Black Lawrence Press, an independent publisher out of the United States, Hala brings to light Arabic words weaved with English in a way that only an Arab-American can. She introduces her readers to concepts of love through war, and love in the shape of war. Hala speaks to many cities about her sadness, but most notably, she lets her guilt towards her country of origin – Palestine – bleed all over the pages.

In one poem, titled “Push,” she apologizes and addresses Gaza along with many other places. The poem is a haunting tribute of love and pain to geographic spaces that have shaped the poet but continue to leave her hanging and not arriving at what she believes is home.

Hala’s heart is everywhere on these pages. It is open for you, the reader, to inspect and watch unravel. She brings you her whole life in a cradle, and unveils smells, thoughts, tastes, and the holiness of being an Arab and a human

in the midst of our ever-changing political and social scenes.

Despite all the noise around her, Hala remains herself, dipping her heart in memories and stories that are like no other, told through her eyes and images of places you will only see through her. In one of her other poems, “Meimei,” she brings us closer to traditions of memory, and protests and accepts the words of her grandmother like we do our intermixed worlds, between modern and ancient, all for the sake of love.

You might think you don’t “get” poetry, or that you are the poet no one knows about; regardless, pick up a copy of *Four Cities* and drown in its scents, animals, fairytales, and hope. Let the poems, short and long, shroud you with their wonders and wandering.

Hala Alyan is a Palestinian-American poet and clinical psychologist whose work has appeared in numerous journals including The Missouri Review, Prairie Schooner, and Colorado Review. Her first full-length poetry collection, ATRIUM (Three Rooms Press), was awarded the 2013 Arab American Book Award in Poetry. Her collection HIJRA was selected as a winner of the 2015 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry and will be published by Southern Illinois University Press. She resides in Manhattan.

