

Book Review

Title: *The History of My Shoes and The Evolution of Darwin's Theory*

Author: Kenny Fries

Publisher: Caroll and Graf Books, 2007

Paperback, ISBN: 0-78672-007-7, 206 pages

Cost: Amazon.com: \$10.17 USD

Reviewer: Nathan Say

If we called this title “a story”, it would be too simple; “narrative poetry” seems more appropriate. Every chapter or so, juxtaposes two different stories: that of the author’s specially fitted orthopedic shoes against Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace competing to develop and publish their theories of adaptations. Together, we see Kenny Fries experiencing his own adaptations throughout his entire life.

Fries currently teaches in the MFA-Poetry program at Goddard College in Vermont. This book, released in 2007 is his second autobiographical work (the first being *Body Remember: A Memoir*, 2003). Throughout the telling of his life in this book, his shoes play a constant role, whether its stories about coming of age, telling of his experiences with his partner Ian, or traveling throughout the world.

After reading the first couple of chapters, I thought this would be another disability memoir. However, I was wrong. It did not dawn on me until after I finished the book and was processing the experience, that Fries’ telling of the second “tale” regarding Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace was his way of coming full circle with his own disability experience.

While the author dislikes his shoes at the beginning of his work, towards the end when the two narratives come together, and Fries and his partner are at the place where Darwin and Wallace once were in the Galapagos (an archipelago of volcanic islands that are located 600 miles west of the country of Ecuador in South America where Darwin discovered his theories), that he becomes grateful for his shoes and the ability his shoes have to transport him all over the world.

I enjoyed the telling of his partner Ian’s struggle with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I have ADHD, and reading about Ian behave and deal with his ADHD the same way that I deal and struggle with my own ADHD, was a relief because I realized other people struggle similarly and that the way I deal with it on a daily basis is just fine.

Fries’ traditional poetic lines, which can be seen in his previous books of poetry titled *Anesthesia: Poems* and *Desert Walking*, are as good, if not better than his narrative poetry. As a person who writes poetry, has multiple disabilities, and is also gay, it is valuable for me to use

Kenny Fries' experiences as a guide, because I realize I am not alone.

This was not an easy book for me to understand. I believe, however, this book, recognized as one winner of a 2007 Gustavus Myers Center Outstanding Book Award for Advancing Human Rights, will become an important piece of literature to our community and culture over the years because the author writes in a way that a general audience, who may not comprehend scientific writing, will be able to understand. Overall, I believe this is a book everyone will enjoy and gain new insights.

References

Fries, K. (1996) *Anesthesia: Poems*. Louisville, KY: Advocado Press.

Fries, K. (2003) *Body, remember: A memoir*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Fries, K. (2000) *Desert walking*. Louisville, KY: Advocado Press.

Nathan Say is Project Coordinator for the "My Voice, My Choice" grant at the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii. He received a B.A. from Brigham Young University-Hawaii in 2007. His interests include Disability Studies/History/Activism, Women's Studies, and Human Sexuality Studies. He also enjoys writing poetry and blogging.