



## WHAT TO KNOW about Billie R. Tadros



Billie R. Tadros lives, writes, and teaches in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where she is an Associate Professor at The University of Scranton and has also taught at Wilkes University in the Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing. She earned her PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and her MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College, and she is a graduate of the Writers Institute at Susquehanna

University. Tadros is the author of three books of poems, including *Was Body* (Indolent Books, 2020), winner of the National Indie Excellence Awards for Poetry in 2021, and *Graft Fixation* (Gold Wake Press, 2020), selected by Gold Wake as the winner of the press's open reading period in 2019. She is "one of ours": inducted into Sigma Tau Delta as an undergraduate, she now serves as a faculty Advisor. Connect with more of Billie and her work at [BillieRTadros.com](http://BillieRTadros.com).

## QUESTIONS: *Was Body* (2020)

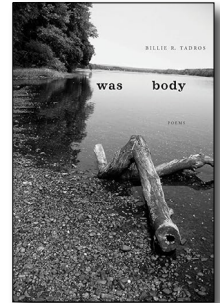
- In *Was Body*, the prose poem "Again-running" is gradually reduced into two further erasures, "gunning" and "un." In what ways might a technique like erasure, which is reductive in content, actually be additive in meaning?
  - There are several other poetic series in *Was Body*. Dispersed across the collection are four "Fun House Mirror Sonnets," five "Postcard[s] Left Unaddressed," four "theme and variations" poems, and several other poems whose titles link them serially. How can a collection cohere around fragmentation and serialization?
- In "Voicemail on Your Birthday Three Years after You Didn't Do It," which Tadros has described as a kind of "abstract" for a collection she has said is "about queer grief," the speaker concludes with these lines:
- When you came you writhed with seizure, so that winter was ecstatic  
dancer, like how you would stick your fingers inside me
- then hold them like triggers against your skull, mouth  
goodbye over and over in sleep.
- How does the metaphor of the gun in this poem speak to the literal guns in other poems in the collection (e.g., in "Again-running" and "Because a line has no endpoint")? In what ways are the speaker's father's suicide and the end of the speaker's romantic relationship linked in a kind of "queer grief"?

- What do you make of the title of the collection, *Was Body*, which emerges from the last line in "Myth of the sanguine temperament, or, she's so vein"?

In an interview in *1508*, the University of Arizona Poetry Center's blog, poet Jon Riccio asks Tadros about the puns and "twists and turns of word relations" in her work, which Riccio refers to as "letter slides." (For example, in "Myth of the sanguine temperament..." the word "vagus" is echoed in "vaguest," and "liver" is echoed in "lover.") Tadros says:

I think the speaker is relying on any sense she can access and represent in the language in order to make sense of this lover she's mythologizing—and the loss of that lover. In that sense (pun always intended), I think the letter slides represent not just a slide, but a dodge—they're indicative of a distraction tactic through which she's trying to convince herself and her audience that while she may see/hear/smell/taste/feel, she doesn't hurt.

- What would you say wordplay and puns are doing in the collection? Do you agree with Tadros that they're a "distraction tactic" the speaker uses?



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

- In C.D. Wright's *Cooling Time: An American Poetry Vigil*, she writes, "What elegy is, not loss but opposition." Which poems in Natalie Diaz's *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, Diana Khoi Nguyen's *Ghost Of*, and Tadros' *Was Body* are elegies? Do any of them represent opposition, rather than loss?
- Nguyen's *Ghost Of* addresses a brother's suicide. Tadros's *Was Body* addresses a father's suicide, as well as a sister's attempted suicide. How might these poets and their grief be in conversation with one another?
- Diaz mythologizes the figure of her brother (as in the title poem of our Common Reader selection), and Tadros mythologizes the figure of her ex-lover (for example, in the "Myth of..." series). How might mythology and storytelling be tools for surviving or opposing grief?
- Diaz's and Tadros' collections both feature poems of queer love. What do these poems have in common with each other? How do they differ?
- Alicia Ostriker has said that in using metaphors, poets make an "agreement that the distance between two things is cancellable because of their likeness, whereby each illuminates some inner truth belonging to the other." How do Tadros and other poets you've read use metaphor to illuminate "inner truths" about the objects and subjects they compare?

## LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- The term used to refer to someone whose loved one has died by suicide is "suicide survivor" (in the sense that the loved one is survived by others). What are the ethics and responsibilities implied by survivorship, and how might writing about someone else's suicide reflect these ethics and responsibilities?
- As Keetje Kuipers notes about Tadros's *Was Body*, the book is "[f]raught with themes of obsession, suicide, and self-harm." What are some of the benefits and challenges of encountering representations of trauma in literature?
- Several of the poems in *Was Body* reference a time prior to the 2015 landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision, which ruled that same-sex couples are guaranteed the fundamental right to marry. In her anthology *Images of Women in Literature*, Mary Anne Ferguson has said that "[l]iterature both reflects and helps to create reality." At a time when the rights of LGBTQ+ people in the United States are facing political scrutiny, how might such literature both reflect and create the history of this community?

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

Donald Antrim, *One Friday in April: A Story of Suicide and Survival* (2021)  
 Joan Baranow and David Watts, eds., *Tell Me Again: Poetry and Prose from the Healing Art of Writing, 2012* (2014)  
 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006)  
 Jill Bialosky, *History of a Suicide: My Sister's Unfinished Life* (2011)  
 Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, & Ethics* (2013)  
 Keetje Kuipers, *All Its Charms* (2019)  
 Kristin Prevallet, *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time* (2007)  
 C.D. Wright, *Cooling Time: An American Poetry Vigil* (2005)

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

[American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](http://AmericanFoundationforSuicidePrevention.org)  
[Everytown for Gun Safety](http://EverytownforGunSafety.org)  
[National Eating Disorders Association](http://NationalEatingDisordersAssociation.org)  
[Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(988 Lifeline\)](http://SuicidePreventionLifeline.org)  
[The Trevor Project](http://TheTrevorProject.org)



## WHAT TO KNOW about Elias Kerr



Elias Kerr is a Transmasculine poet, who writes under the pen name E Kerr. They graduated from The University of Scranton in 2023, with a masters degree in occupational therapy, and double minors in English and writing. They are the recipient of the inaugural 2022 Stemmler/Dennis LGBT& Award.

Their work has been featured in various publications, including *Rappahannock Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and the *Hollins Critic*, and their debut collection, *trans [re]incarnation*, was released in April 2023, with Mason Jar Press. Kerr lives and writes in Scranton, PA, with their cat, Nola.

For more information, access [ekerrpoetry.carrd.co/](http://ekerrpoetry.carrd.co/).

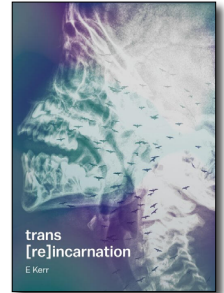
## QUESTIONS: *trans [re]incarnation* (2023)

*trans [re]incarnation* is a collection of poems that aims to articulate what “queers” texts and bodies, as well as to represent lived queer experiences, through reflections on how others have read and interpreted—and gendered—the body.

In a 2018 interview with *The Bennington Review*, Jericho Brown states that

part of the reason why I wanted to invent a form is because I want full participation for myself, but also for anyone who’s writing after me, in the tradition. And the way that you become a part of it is that you literally deal with it. You participate by writing in received forms, but also by creating forms for others to receive, and also by subverting forms, by thumbing your nose at them.

- How does Kerr’s use of received forms, both traditional (such as the sestina) and contemporary (such as the duplex), participate in conversations with other queer poets like Brown?
- Kerr’s use of space on the page in both “I Am Neither Your Daughter, Nor Son” and “The Letter” serves several purposes in each of the poems. How are they using space in similar ways? How are they using space differently?
- In the title piece of the collection, “trans [re]incarnation,” reference to a “she” is present throughout the sonnets. Is the speaker referring to the same individual in each piece or multiple “she’s”?



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Both E Kerr’s *trans [re]incarnation* and Natalie Diaz’s *When My Brother Was an Aztec* reimagine/reinterpret Biblical stories and imagery. What poems and stories do these poets turn to? In what ways does this “revision” empower marginalized communities who have been outcast by other interpretations of Biblical texts?
- The speaker in Kerr’s “They Want To Run Us (Into Our Graves)” opens by using imagery related to gun suicide. How does this speaker use imagery of gun suicide in ways that put the piece in conversation with Billie Tardos’ *Was Body* and Diana Khoi Nguyen’s *Ghost Of*?
- Poems from Billie Tardos’ *Was Body* and E Kerr’s *trans [re]incarnation* play with erasure. What does this formal choice lend to both the speaker and the reader of these pieces? How does the use of erasure in literature align with the erasure of marginalized identities in the current political climate?
- The speaker in Kayleb Rae Candrilli’s “[Sestina Written as Though Genesis](#)” uses the sestina form to depict an origin or beginning. How is this similar to Kerr’s use of the sestina in their poem “Trans Creation Myth - A Sestina Written After A Year Knowing This Body”?

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

[The Trevor Project](#)

[Lambda Literary](#)

[Human Rights Campaign: Transgender Resources](#)

[PFLAG](#)

[RAINN](#)

Find community mental health programs near you

Contact your local women’s resource center or domestic violence center for support and resources

## LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- In the twelfth sonnet of Kerr’s “trans [re]incarnation,” the speaker says  
...humans want to be autobiographical, but instead end up restricted to third person points of view, and transgender people can authorize further revisions to these narratives, consent to being born by their own anatomy.  
In what ways does both the writing of and reading of this book offer a “revision” and autonomy?
- Looking at what the speaker says in “My therapist wants me to write about home,” how might this collection and collections by other trans authors “stand as testament enough” to being hopeful? How can we as a literary community inspire, support, or strike that hope?
- In Kerr’s first poem, “I Am Neither Your Daughter, Nor Son,” the speaker ends by saying “blood is the only//thing we all have in common—it doesn’t know boy/girl or anything in between.” In a time when definitions of “biology” and “sex” are being used as political weapons to strip people of rights and sow division, what is the role of the literary community in defining/redefining definitions of “gender” and “sex” that limit the stories available to us?

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

Jericho Brown, *The Tradition* (2019)

Kayleb Rae Candrilli, *Winter of Worship* (2025) and *Water I Won’t Touch* (2021)

Meg Day, *Last Psalm at Sea Level* (2014)

Torrin a. Greathouse, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020)