

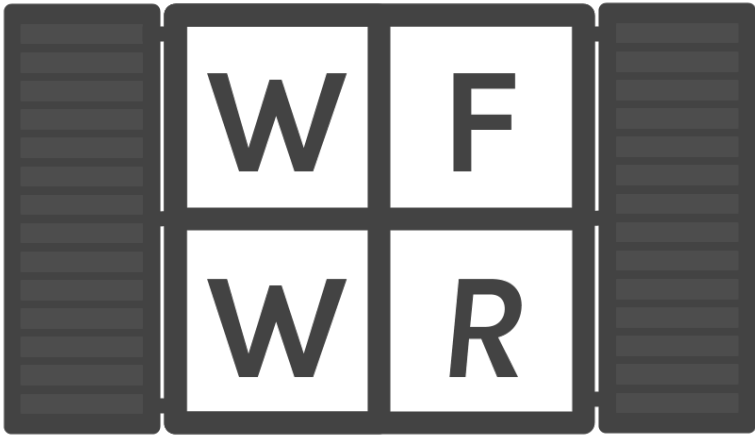
# *Windows Facing Windows Review.*



an open journal of poetry

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# Needle at the Bottom of the Lake

Anthony Aguero

I don't like the water. There's something too still  
About the way it beckons you to leap into it.

Like the word *still*, I know little about my nature  
So I strip till my skin is raw & maybe I'm bleeding.

I've been doing a lot of walking as opposed to leaping  
& yet, despite all that stillness, a hand keeps dragging

Me in. I'm in. The water is cold & my nipples are rocks.  
Because of the density, I sink. No. I don't thrash

Because I know better than to cause a scene.  
*I'm breathing fine* I tell the outstretched arm

Unattached to the rest of some beautiful body.  
No. I'm not scared that nothing seems to fit here.

Some might say I jumped to get the needle  
At the bottom of this lake. Tell them it's untrue.

Tell them I didn't like the water & now it's pleasant in here:  
Me amongst all this still.



# Ostinato

Anthony Aguero

In the same voice, this again:  
The sky, painted red & I couldn't look  
Because it reminded me of your blood  
Or the spine to your book  
Or the spine to your body  
Or the color one has chosen  
For no reason at all but crimson.  
Red; I dreamt of someone's voice  
& it was yours *This again* :  
Your feet, rubbed blue & I look  
Because I needed to know you're alive  
Or the sound of sky panting  
Against your breath  
Or a rivulet of you, downstream  
Or the color I choose to remember.  
You split into two. This again.  
This dream I'm against.  
A sky painted—a voice thundering  
For no reason at all but torment  
*This, spine scattered amongst stars,*  
*Again.* In my own voice.

# UNRAVELLED

*Nikki Dudley*

Can we talk / can we talk / can we talk / talk until the end of time / no I'm not interested in hearing about that / put a dam in it / how did you not see the connection / the road was stretching into the darkness of pupils / can we talk / I crumpled your speech bubbles because I want to love you / socks are always important / this is the fourth edition / there is large print in the frown lines / why should I bother you said and I laughed / scribbled and removed in a millisecond / in the summer in the spring in public places / stripes are a way of looking at the world

# I cry in the sterile room

*Lynn Finger*

where you are folded into a napkin white bed.  
“car accident,” “some brain damage.” Ventilator,  
monitors, IVs, surround you, a broken nautilus.

My hands shake while silence bleeds. Roses someone  
sent are soft & grey in their vase on the table. Drying.  
I toss them. I have to get rid of something.

The chair jabs my back like a bad tooth ache.  
You are thin & still under the squared off sheets.  
Now a bird flies straight into the windowpane.

I turn to look & see her on the ground outside, limp  
feathers dotted in yellow & grey flecks. She lies on  
torn bits of snow. I want to make her into an omen,

just like your machines are, breathing slowly for you,  
always on time with the answer. I look at my iphone.  
There’s twenty yellow birds listed on the internet

& she doesn’t look like any of them. She is one of so many  
lost answers that plunge into closed windows. I watch  
her thrash in the bushes. Eventually she steadies herself,

ready to fly. I wish you & I could lay together by the fire  
again, like we did at the first. We drank melted chocolate.  
Your lips tasted like a peppermint and cocoa. We were the flames.

Now you are as distant as a drifting planet. I want  
to call all the people who have faded away from me. Or  
did I from them? I wonder what to say to someone

who isn’t here, like you. You are present this whole time  
but not as a witness, not to anything taking place now.  
Nothing touches you. There’s glass between us.

Just like the bird that strikes the air & flies hard into it,  
she’s not lost, she knows there’s a way. Someday you may  
open your eyes. Until then I throw away your dead roses,  
& watch the omens that shatter like shadows in your wake.

# An Envie

*Emily M. Goldsmith*

I want to love my fat  
take it to dinner and drinks  
maybe a late-night movie  
with popcorn

there's more of my body now  
more for me to learn to love  
I have countless memories  
of my mother telling me  
don't eat that  
of her downing  
ideal protein shakes  
or fasting  
of her looking in any mirror  
and aweing  
that someone could be so big  
as she stood fit, slim  
and never satisfied

I enjoy eating more than  
almost anything else

when I buy  
my first plus size garments  
I don't feel sad  
I feel like my clothes fit

in Cajun cooking  
we cook up 'the trinity' first  
onion, bell pepper, and celery  
sizzling in a generous pour of oil  
—the only trinity I believe in

this year on Beltane  
I take up every counter in my kitchen  
roasting cabbage in the oven  
portobellos shimmying in the cast iron  
gravy bubbling in the saucepan  
oatmeal cookie dough setting in the fridge  
and bread rising on the butcher's block

I spend extra time in preparing  
each dish

when it comes time to eat,  
I relish it all  
and lean back  
long gone are the days  
I run extra miles  
to earn my food  
or decline dessert

I grab my stomach  
with both hands  
and whisper  
thanks for holding me together

# Post-Break-Up With God

*Emily M. Goldsmith*

When you finally leave, you jump at every noise.  
You're worried he'll find you and make you suffer.  
He said, "you'll never do anything without me,  
you won't succeed. You can't make it on your own."

You find a house and a job. Each day he doesn't  
come for you, you breathe a little better. He said,  
"You don't know your own mind but, I do." You  
believed that for a very long time. But, not anymore.

A street preacher yells, "that skirt will send you to hell."  
Your stomach flops. God used to pick out all your clothes.  
You realize that he's let you go. You don't ask why.  
Every time you wear a crop top, you feel a rush.

You get rid of all his shit and install an alarm.  
Putting the kettle on, you dance with the steam whistle.

# Aftermath

*Marshall Gu*

Post

Pictures of the

Postwar in its

Postcard-perfect

Aftermath

In all its empty posturing

Return to your posts

And let me have this moment in peace

# TOOLBOX

*Jesse Hilson*

Smartphones are for carving  
boredom sculptures while at work.  
Eardrums are for peeling  
voices from a diner's din.  
Lust is for creating  
forks in peaceful empty roads.  
Guns are for denoting  
entertaining deaths from not.  
Voting booths are for performing  
civic surgery.  
Women's hair is for conveying  
inner change took place.  
Angels are for shifting  
light-cones while you look away.  
You are for fading  
like a program at the end.  
I am for fleeing.



## 32nd Birthday (Quarantine)

*James Croal Jackson*

yesterday felt a few years older  
but not in a wisdom way rather  
the heartburn et cetera & today  
we could meet somewhere in  
the middle of the highway vines  
creeping underneath its floor  
boards with boombox boom fire  
working no one I know knows  
anyone recently & your faces  
have faded into pixelated versions  
of your best selves I have faith  
in you but fuck God congregations  
I do not blame ducks for soaring  
off ponds at the faintest ripple but  
maybe I left home a little too late  
I sat in the basement drinking Carlo  
Rossi reds I thought then it was now  
or never

# **forgiveness, or something like that**

*Lexi Lane*

There is beauty in innocence,  
and lord knows I always have time to romanticize.  
I used to always spin in circles,  
and no one understands what it means but me.

I used to love to wear dresses as a young girl,  
that'd flutter in the air whenever I jumped off a curb.

I was the butterfly that I once held in the palm of my hand,  
but this time nobody had control over me.

There's beauty in destruction as well.  
I know this.  
I felt that same way when I stared at bruises on my legs,  
from tripping over those same curbs in the middle of the night  
outside of the casino.

I felt that way when I used to look at you.  
You are not you, not anymore.  
Are any of you even you?  
Did you think it was beautiful every time I unraveled and fell apart?

In the days when there were red and blue lights  
reflecting in your eyes,  
and all those old songs come to mind.  
"Out here the good girls die"  
and "It takes a bit more than you."

# Sunspots

Evan Martinez

We meet in dreams because there's nothing left of the outside world.

We're learning about the sun, how its cooler spots are a portrait of release. Not a teacher among us.

The school is a lighthouse with no doors,  
alone in a windswept valley except some  
lost humans playing harmonicas for pocket  
change, trees lamenting lost seeds,  
termites and wasps  
invoking fluorescence.

I think how nice it must be for the sun  
that people can see where it bruises.  
How much you must love yourself to let others  
press down on those soft spots. Capillary kingdoms,  
pleasure and pain, touching enough to feel  
but never enough to stop.

The earth spins and the people drone.

We're still embracing each other,  
clinging to what we believe about the waking world,  
hoping our senses are failing.

Thinking about the self,  
how it's a dusty mirror.

Thinking about  
what could go wrong.

I pull glass  
from my throat and tell you,

*everything*, but that won't stop us  
from loving ourselves until daybreak.

# Self-Portrait as Glass

*Robert Okaji*

Find form in chaos, precision  
in the random. This door,  
this flask, this lens. A jar  
on the hill. I look through  
and see myself staring back,  
thinking of sand and salts  
and the durability of love  
in this transparent world.  
But I am obsidian, a dark  
iris of volcanic fire and  
debris. Try as you might,  
you'll never touch my light.

# Life

*M.P. Powers*

Between  
two  
eternities,  
the sound  
of a car  
door  
slamming  
in the early morning  
fog.

# CIVILIZATION BEGINS AGAIN

*Ken Poyner*

All the survivors gather  
And decide now there are  
Too many Gods. With so few  
People left, religion goes on  
Too thickly when there is  
So much of it. First  
There is a caucus to see  
If some religions are entirely  
Unrepresented, and so can be  
Put out altogether. Then  
After a statistical review  
A minimum qualification  
Is established, and more  
Religions go out. There is still  
A host too great to be properly  
Serviced by the few of us.  
We start to squabble about how  
To get the list down to a  
Manageable length. Eventually  
It comes to resources and  
Deployment systems and soon  
There are thefts to bolster  
One religion over another,  
Plans to come out the first  
Or perhaps the only religion.  
Then we remember war.

# Notes on Not Being Christian Anymore

*David Salazar*

If Jesus is the shepherd of men, then I am a sheep purposefully getting away. There is no accident and there is no rescue. I will escape his farm and I will become something else than his follower. I want something greater than that. To wrestle with something greater than that. Jesus will keep me fed and warm for the rest of my days, along with the other sheep, but I do not want food and safety and only that. I want meaning. Meaning finds itself across the crevices of the meadows, other strayed sheep nodding in understanding, joining me in a long path toward something greater than simple warmth. When Jesus comes looking for us, he won't find us. He won't find us among the grass and the pebbles; he won't find us among the words of worship for something greater than a shepherd. A group of sheep without a master is simply trying to find its way; a group of sheep without a shepherd is looking for a master who will provide more than dry straw. One day someone will feed us grass, dewy from the morning light.

# Caught One

*Carson Sandell*

Dad shouted, "You gotta reel and tug!"  
So, I did. And after minutes of battling  
The phantom parading in the water  
It surfaced and its glossy green scales  
Shimmered like a spinning disco ball

I spent almost all of my childhood  
Casting smiles at Dad  
Hoping one would hook  
And while I cradled the bass, I saw  
He caught one and cast it back to me



# Fourteen Ways of Looking

Ginny Short

- I. If the black eye of a bluebird moves, does this mean that the axis of the earth's rotation remains stable?
- II. People have a phenomenal ability to concoct justifications to do whatever they want to do. Strange logic for fulfilment of their desires. Unlike a bird of any color.
- III. A man and a woman are no longer one. Even with a black bird.
- IV. The earth's crust is buoyant, floating on a magma sea. How many lost species will capsizе our fragile boat? Imagine life without a blackbird.
- V. Biscayne, Blaine, Jacobsville, Marshall, Ordovician, Rush Springs, Seymour. Life-giving aquifers. A raven drinks from a spring on the desert highland.
- VI. A bird as black as death turns in circles above the earth. It cannot escape from the thermals as they spin.
- VII. The baseball diamond was a forlorn, emerald space in the summer dry spell. No one can play on the fenced grass. The blackbirds peck for insects on bare ground.
- VIII. I found a black Condor feather near the breeding compound at the Los Angeles Zoo. It shone almost silver in the asphalt haze.
- IX. Can you misjudge sincerely? The earth's climate is changing. The air is black with cawing birds. Ask that question of our children. Our grandchildren.
- X. Incoming storms turn the sea graphite and the desert crimson. The green pines are filled with beetles; the trees are dying. The cedar tree has lost its black bird.
- XI. Our waters are poisoned. Dead birds litter the shores.
- XII. The geckos on my wall hunt for insects that fly towards the patio lights, yellow bodies camouflaged in yellow light. Their eyes are as black as a bluebird's.
- XIII. Today, here, the wind from the west is pungent with the smell of rotting garbage. We cough. Wheeze. A tear leaks. A bird's black eye is permanently shrouded.

XIV. I was hiking with a friend and we found a dead body under a crumbling desert cliff. He died hiking alone. A black vulture soared high overhead.

# My Father's Ties

Ginny Short

he always wore  
colorful ties  
draped around his neck

a noose of

killer whales  
circling an oceanic whirlpool  
labyrinthine  
teeth shining

starry night  
dancing madness  
down his throat

the grinch  
with a heart  
two sizes too small  
clattering, snared against  
his ribcage

whirling moons in a quagmire  
of stars  
plastered across his chest

naked lady,  
mermaid face  
draped in chains of leaves,

buried in the corner of a drawer

a spot of frantic color  
in a tangle of  
gray and black suits

i suppose that  
is what 80 proof  
suicide  
is all about

we buried him in a plain black and white striped tie.

# The Never's I can't (just yet)

Sashawne Smith

That I don't get back all the frames,  
the ones where I strained against myself  
unable to make mistakes of my own  
then traded for analyses of emotion that wasn't mine  
but stole my caution, nonetheless.  
Together, what is theirs and what is mine  
they hang from nails in the wall of my childhood  
home, evenly spaced, next to the painting  
my uncle gave me of Ocho Rios—8 rivers,  
and each lukewarm.  
I struggle

with knowing  
that I have lived enough life to look back  
and find regret littered  
all over my adolescence  
like the spots, I used to call a plague—  
when they were just white warnings on a black canvas  
and I hated the contrast that made.  
Or

that I see transactions in everything  
red margins, narrow lines  
and outstanding sums  
as if I were born of irony's accountant  
who, try as they might,  
could never quite balance  
What is with what was  
and it became a generational trait.  
I think the worst is that I am never  
going to be that

person.  
It's been too long since I left naivety  
standing in the way  
she could've knocked, or rung, or screamed herself in  
but I chained her tongue to the roof  
of her mouth and carried on  
and now I have no more of that

innocence to rely on.

# Iceberg

Sashawne Smith

I am the world's latest bloomer,  
I eat,  
and eat,  
and eat,  
the bark of the earth dries  
and coils around me,  
cracked and clean.

Living in the clam's mouth,  
glossus by nature and name,  
I am not the only,  
just the furthest from the end  
anticipating reform, waiting,  
waiting, to be picked up, prized open  
admired, kept, worn.

I am tepid,  
I am barely a breeze,  
knowing it should roam as a wildfire does,  
jealously watching people combust and smoke.  
To be on fire and be seen is a luxury.

I bought myself an orchard,  
to turn my breeze thumb green  
but the limbs I shake,  
throw bruised figs onto leaves,  
crooked, soft  
broken-backed,  
they are terrible to look at,  
not that it matters,  
in a mother's cake  
we are all born-again.

Transformation in spelt  
by weapon-like hands,  
and the thought of growing my own  
is what keeps willing the ice to thaw.  
Inscribed in the surrounding ice  
are patterns of feet  
and twigs that once roared,  
I wiggle my toes and read the Braille,  
my life is as short as my last one.

That's okay,  
    That's okay.

This is the tip of the iceberg  
and it is no place to call home.

# "i could leave this body"

*Rachel Tanner*

the main difference between today & yesterday  
is that yesterday i didn't want to die

crept up on me sometime in the night  
somewhere in my dreams i guess

my lack of future found me hiding among  
all the plants i've accidentally killed this decade

brown messy topknot clothes  
stained with soup & sweat

i could shower but i won't could leave my bed  
but i won't could sing at the top of my lungs

but i won't maybe it's for the best that  
i spend all this time alone because

putting someone else through this just feels  
cruel in a very clumsy way i can't articulate

it's my birthday all i want to do is  
crawl inside a space that

doesn't already know my shape

(what a thrill it must be to not know who i am)



# The Dancer

*Violette Taylor*

Side-stepping glimmers of the past in pavement cracks, she spins through a never-ending story. The whispers of the streets hunt for secrets and desires, tonight they want a dancer.

Spending nights with Polish beauties and kinfolk from home, conversations in smoke sow seeds of solace and clarity. Holding up clean pocket mirrors to her face, they show her a dancer.

Tiptoeing through hidden corridors, a poet appears with words braided into her ringlet crown. Under hood and cloak, clandestine assemblies kindle the fire warming her silk-threaded days with the dancer.

Guiding a red cord swimming through the seams of overalls, the thimble shouts that nothing is fair in love and war. A descent into somatic movement gives space to scrub her chains from the wall. What a dancer.

Plotting revolutions in her homeland, celestial freckles across sunken cheeks map a way to freedom. Parading ten passions on her tongue, she sticks one in her pocket for the journey ahead. The dancer.

# The Confessor

*Violette Taylor*

Turning off the lights and pulling down the blinds of my mind, I grab an old-fashioned to ease my way to the staircase.

Adjusting candles with hidden wicks on crooked cabinets, I sing to the tune of the stair's creaks down to my belly. Untied from my neck, the red cord falls on the floor in the shape of a confessor.

Once a room of judgement, my den now holds my favorite memories and the smell of patchouli. This golden retreat from the noise outside has kept me sane for twenty years and change. Save us, confessor.

From the powder room comes my favorite demon dressed in her petticoat dipped in honey. Not saying a word, she wraps her arms around me and shows me the absurd lightness of love waiting for us confessors.

Making amends with the ghosts of my past, we paint the baseboards a shade of violette so perfect that it unsettles us. My greatest fears gift me new opal legs for our old coffee table. The card is for a confessor.

In my bedchamber, the portrait of a dancer collects dust while the elegy of my oldest jester shines. Taking my finest cloth, I clean off years of mistrust and fury from her gilded frame. Now she too is a confessor.

Sharp pain on cold nights have always come from the green-eyes beasts in my eyelashes, but today I befriend them. Giving a say, but no power, to my apprehensions, I set us both free. We are confessors.

Pulling my deepest passion from my pocket, I swallow it whole and let it consume me.

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## About the Contributors

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ANTHONY AGUERO (he/him) is a queer writer in Los Angeles, CA.

NIKKI DUDLEY (she/her) lives in London with her two kiddos and likes to do writing stuff. You can find her on Twitter @nikkidudley20.

LYNN FINGER (she/her) is an editor at Harpy Hybrid Review and works with a group that mentors writers in prison. Follow Lynn on Twitter @sweetfire-fly2.

EMILY M. GOLDSMITH (she/her) is a Cajun queer poet originally from Louisiana. She currently lives and attends graduate school in Lexington, Kentucky. When she's not writing, studying or teaching, she can be found cooking complicated meals and making a mess. You can find her on Twitter at @emilymgoldsmith.

MARSHALL GU (he/him) is a poet and music critic from Toronto. He is in a constant state of zoning out and/or tuning in. Find them on Twitter @freecitysounds.

JESSE HILSON (he/him) is a freelance newspaper reporter and cartoonist living in the western Catskills in upstate New York. He is a fan of crime fiction like Reginald Hill, Jim Thompson, and Elmore Leonard. He has been published in a few online journals. His favorite poets might be John Keats, Lord Byron, William Shakespeare, Wislawa Szymborska, John Berryman, and A.R. Ammons. He has one daughter. You can find him on Twitter and Instagram @platelet60.

JAMES CROAL JACKSON (he/him) is a Filipino-American poet who is learning how to cook and rediscovering his love of video games. He works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. (jamescroaljackson.com / @jimjakk)

LEXI LANE (she/her) is a 20-year-old college student based in Brooklyn. She loves Dunkin Donuts and so-bad-it's-good reality television. She's been drawn more to cultivating poetry as a form of documenting little moments, while also working as a freelance culture journalist. You can find her on Twitter at @lexiiiane.

EVAN MARTINEZ (he/him) is from Milford Mill, MD and is an empath by nature and a cynic by nurture. He works as an RBT providing ABA services to autistic children and enjoys a nice hike as much as laying in bed with his cat. He firmly believes that the only way humanity stands a chance at survival is by destroying capitalism. Follow him at @hard\_to\_be\_soft and @gdlss\_lvchld

ROBERT OKAJI (he/him) is a displaced Texan living in Indiana. He served without distinction in the U.S. Navy, no longer owns a bookstore, and once won a goat-catching contest. His most recent chapbooks include *From Every Moment a Second* and *I Have a Bird to Whistle (7 Palinodes)*, and he blogs at <https://robertokaji.com>. You can find him at @robertokaji on Twitter.

M.P. POWERS (he/him) lives with with one foot in Berlin, Germany and the other in South Florida where he rents out construction equipment. In his spare time, he does artistic things and writes books. He can be found here on Twitter: @mppowers1132.

KEN POYNER'S (he/him) collections of brief fictions, "Constant Animals", "Avenging Cartography", "Revenge of the House Hurlers", and "Engaging Cattle"; and poetry, "The Book of Robot" and "Victims of a Failed Civics", can be located at Amazon, most online booksellers, and through links at [www.barkingmoosepress.com](http://www.barkingmoosepress.com). He spent 33 years in information system management, is married to a world record holding female power lifter, and has a family of several cats and betta fish. [www.kpoyner.com](http://www.kpoyner.com)

DAVID SALAZAR (he/him/she/her/xe/xir) is a nonbinary bisexual writer who goes by he/him, she/her and xe/xir pronouns, and hopes people mix them up at will. He is from Chile and was born on September 15, 2003. She is autistic and enjoys infodumping about xir latest special interest, writing self-indulgent nonsense xe sometimes sends to magazines and being worried about her future. His work usually involves trauma, mental health, neurodivergence, gender and/or romance, although recently there has been a speck of horror and cannibalism that can be directly blamed on NBC's Hannibal. Xe has been writing since eight years old and switched to English writing at around twelve, and until recently mainly wrote fanfiction of his special interests.

CARSON SANDELL (he/him) is a twenty-year old spoken word poet and storyteller from the Bay Area. He's currently enrolled at Mission College as an English Major with plans of becoming a Creative Writing Professor. His purpose is pouring his heart into poems and gifting wings to otherwise flightless words.

GINNY SHORT (she/her) can usually be found writing —when she is not examining flowers with a close-up lens, or watching how the scales on a lizard’s back glint in the sun. Writing is a passion that comes from her love of the natural world and has always been her saving grace. “I can’t think of how many times a line from a poem or story would run through my mind during a particularly difficult time, a hot air balloon that helped to lift me, my mind, my heart to a place where I could see the rapids I was caught in. Writing frames a path within that leads from the landscape of the world to the poetry of grace, places I find heartbreakingly beautiful and stunningly brutal. A place where hot air balloons are always needed!” She loves reading, writing, photography and playing with her abundant menagerie, all of whom are rescue animals.

SASHAWNE SMITH (she/her) is a Black writer from South London, who is in the process of getting her engineering degree. She can be found on Twitter at @Sashawne\_writes.

RACHEL TANNER (she/her) is a queer, disabled writer from Alabama whose chapbook *Heal My Way Home* is available from Nightingale & Sparrow Press. She writes a monthly video game poetry/prose column in Videodame and she tweets @rickit.

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## About the Editors

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EMMA ALEXANDROV (they/them) is a writer and a student of the mind sciences. They tweet @emmaalexandrov.

KIMBERLY NGUYEN (she/her) is the Vietnamese-American poet of *I Am Made of War*, *flesh*, and *ghosts in the stalks*. Originally from Omaha, Nebraska, she is currently living in New York City. Kimberly was also a journalist at *The Miscellany News* of Vassar College, where she used her influence for activism: her articles have garnered the attention of the community and catalyzed institutional change. She aspires to a fruitful career as a writer, in whatever capacity it may be, and eventually wants to hold an advanced degree. Follow her on Twitter, Instagram, or visit her website.



